

**“YES, YOUR FEARS ARE CORRECT. HE IS DISTURBED, WHETHER IT’S  
DIAGNOSABLE OR NOT:”  
RISK DISCOURSE IN PARENTING GUIDES**

**DAN KONECNY**  
B.A., University of Lethbridge, 2013

A Thesis  
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
of the University of Lethbridge  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree

**MASTER OF ARTS**

Department of Sociology  
University of Lethbridge  
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

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**Dan Konecny**

Date of Defense: December 1, 2017.

Dr. J. Laurendeau Supervisor	Associate Professor	PhD
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Dr. K. Mair Thesis Examination Committee Member	Associate Professor	PhD
--	---------------------	-----

Dr. K. Alexander Thesis Examination Committee Member	Assistant Professor	PhD
---	---------------------	-----

Dr. T. Perks Chair, Thesis Examination Committee	Associate Professor	PhD
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## Abstract

Parenting guides are illustrative of the current ethos of parenting and provide a rich site of examination due to the intersecting discourses that shape knowledge regarding ‘proper’ parenting. In this thesis, I offer a discourse analysis on the parenting guides *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy* (2003) by Michael Bradley, *Brainstorm* (2013) by Daniel Siegel, and the parenting website *Empowering Parents* in order to illuminate how discourses of risk (re)produce and naturalize assumptions of parenting and adolescence. I contend that each text utilizes risk to define adolescents as an inherent threat to themselves and their communities if left unchecked and situates parents as the shepherds for adolescence, shepherds who are subject to responsibility and blame. Both adolescence and parenting are produced as objects of expert knowledge that position adulthood as the normative foil to adolescence.

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## Chapter 1: Locating Risk Discourse in Contemporary Culture

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the general state of parenting and child development evolved from being a private matter, concerning each individual family, to communally apprehended strategies that were constructed by experts to ensure children and youth had productive upbringings. These changes were influenced by various factors, including the shifting dynamic of the marketplace, the growing pressure of the media, and the increasing amounts of exposure the common person had to science and scientific rhetoric (Matt, 2002; Cote & Allahaar, 2006). Through this cultural change, raising children came to occupy an intersection of the overlapping marketing and scientific spheres, a shift that was part of a broader transition in the conceptualization of young people as a whole (Burnham, 1996).

More specifically, in what Gleason (2005) calls the emergence of the public child, the rearing of young ones became increasingly intertwined with scientific discourses of protection, prevention, and statistical attention. As a result, doctors took a more central role in the regulation of children through the provision of advice that parents were expected to follow. When disaster did occur to a child, it was largely understood that it was the mother to blame from her “abject parental carelessness,” for failing to follow the most recent childrearing methods (Burnham, 1996, p. 822). As childhood and youth development became subsumed under the domain of science, parenthood shifted to be discursively fraught with stressors, pressures, responsibilities, blame, and, most importantly, *risk* from the new calculated and seemingly objective approach. In contemporary times, risk is a central imperative for youth and child development and

expert advice is a common reference point for parents to understand and protect their young ones.

Within this thesis, I explore the relationship between risk, adolescent development, and expert knowledge in order to demonstrate how dominant ideas regarding child and youth upbringing normalize particular conceptualizations of adolescence and parenting. Furthermore, by conducting a discourse analysis on parenting guides as cultural texts, I illustrate how discourses of risk (re)produce particular narratives of proper parenting in relation to adolescence or a pathologized understanding thereof. I utilize two parenting books and an online parenting website as cultural texts. These parenting guides are demonstrative of how risk is both implicitly and explicitly used as the rationality for how and why parents should care for their children, and to what extent these rationalities can influence how we perceive adolescents and parents' 'proper' relationships with them. All three texts employ a different outlook and approach regarding how 'proper' parenting should be understood, and are all published between the years of 2003 to 2015 in the United States by American authors.

This chapter examines how risk discourse is embedded in various institutions surrounding childhood and youth development, including the significance of parenting guides as a representation of parenting, the commonality of risk as a concept, how risk discourse came to be fundamentally linked with certain regimes of science and education, and how the marketplace (re)produces these tropes through advertising and marketing strategies in efforts to gain consumers.

### *The Rise of Parenting Guides in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

The ethos of parenting is continuously reshaped and redefined by the shifting local histories and social events of each respective time frame (Quirke, 2006; Dobris, et. al., 2016; Hoffman, 2010). As such, concepts of parenting are in constant flux and are difficult to define, especially when considering the cultural intersections of class, race, and other systems of alterity. We can, however, examine how different texts shift in tone and message throughout the decades to get a grasp on how the experts of each time defined “proper” parenting and how these definitions shaped broader understandings of parenthood, childhood, and adolescence.

As various scientists turned their attention to childhood development in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Olsen, 2014; Stearns, 2010), different forms of advice and strategies for parents permeated the public sphere, reflecting a growing understanding of the importance of nurturing the mental well-being of babies and young children (Quirke, 2006). While factors such as hygiene and physical growth were previously considered the central aspects of proper parenting (Hoffman, 2010), the emerging understanding of the importance of psychological and mental growth of young children promoted a cultural shift in parenting, reflecting a change in what leading scientific experts considered a healthy child. Despite some controversy and cultural pushback against prominent figures in these fields (e.g., Freud [Dobris, et al., 2016]), the contours of mainstream parenting became entwined with a certain degree of scientific understanding (Quirke, 2006). However, a great deal of the information on childhood development manifested from an academic background and was difficult for the public to both acquire and properly interpret (Dobris, et. al., 2016). The emergence of parenting guides—texts containing a version of “expert” knowledge *meant* for the public sphere—marked a significant



transition in how the public could access expert knowledge; interrogating these guides can provide a glimpse into the ethos of parenting in each era through the ways in which these guides instruct parents to care for their children (Quirke, 2006).

In the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, parenting guides slowly gained in popularity, perhaps mirroring the coinciding emergence of scientific discourses into the mainstream (Stearns, 2010; Quirke, 2006). Some argue, however, that it was Dr. Benjamin Spock's *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* that, both in terms of affordability and readability, was the most significant text to translate childhood development science into easily accessible knowledge for the average parent to consume (Dobris, et al., 2016). Spock, dissatisfied with the lack of connection between leading psychology research into child development and common pediatric practices, embarked on the task of writing advice texts that emphasized that “good mothers did not need to be scientists to be good parents” but instead “needed only to follow their own instincts and their doctor’s advice” (Dobris et al, 2016, p. 44). Spock’s first edition, released in 1946, sold over 750,000 copies in the first year, and it was not long thereafter that it became an indispensable text for many middle-income families.

The release of Spock’s book showed almost overnight that parenting guides can be a profitable industry, and it was not long before many other doctors and scientists started releasing their own guides directed towards the public sphere (Dobris et. al, 2016). Spock, over a 46-year period, continued releasing revised editions until his final book in 1992. Each of Spock’s reiterations was favourably received by the mainstream public (despite significant critiques from peers in his field and other academics) and the changes made in each version demonstrate how perspectives of parenting shifted throughout the decades.

In his 1946 version, Spock represents mothers as natural, intuitive caregivers, but emphasized that they should use expert advice whenever possible; as was typical of the time, husbands/fathers were completely omitted from the text. Any outside contact or employment that the mother may have had was also ignored; the mother's duty (and instinct) was framed only in relation to raising children (Dobris et. al, 2016). In Spock's 1969 version, by contrast, the mother was represented as a citizen who "chose" to become a mother outside of her other interests but nonetheless was naturally gifted to raise children with her intrinsic intuition (Dobris et. al, 2016). Regardless of the mother's citizenship, all of Spock's texts up to this point (including his 1957 revision) made no mention of any employment or economic issues that parents may encounter, making it clear that financial issues were not among his considerations of childrearing despite the expenses of having children (Quirke, 2006). Beginning with the 1976 version and elaborated in the 1985 version, Spock recognized fathers as a significant part of raising children, and the "working mother" as an important presence in contemporary families. His texts also finally described financial woes that can hinder parenting, recognizing that parenting is not simply for the middle class, even if the guides still tended to be geared toward the white middle class (Dobris et. al, 2016).

Spock's final text in 1992 revolved much more significantly around the cognitive development of children, a departure from his previous versions that emphasized the innate intuition of mothers. In this way, science became more of his central premise in childrearing. Although Spock did not dismiss a mother's natural ability to parent, his overall tone switched from his famous premise of "you know more than you think" to a duality between instinct and scientific knowledge (Dobris, et. al, 2016). Spock wasn't alone in this transition; childrearing literature as a whole gravitated towards the cognitive

development of children, whereas throughout the 1970s and 1980s the dominant focus had been on children's health and safety as well as activities to keep them happily occupied (Hoffman, 2010). Also, despite most parenting guides still being heavily geared toward white, middle-class families, in the 1990s some parenting guides and magazines started targeting niche parenting markets in a way that had never before been seen. Same-sex, visually impaired, single parents, and other minority groups all had magazines and advice written specifically for them, with cognitive development as the centerpiece to the types of strategies espoused (Quirke, 2006). This shift was mirrored in schools, toys, and media as childhood brain strength training became seen as the most important facet of raising children aside from children's physical safety.

Currently, cognitive development is still a primary focus of childrearing. However, risk and risk management have grown to be the guiding factor in achieving a child's "learning potential" through controlling against unproductive hobbies, monitoring development, and providing stimulating experiences to encourage cognitive growth (Hoffman, 2010). This new fixation on risk changes the landscape of parenting in many ways as it is not simply the brain of a child that is under the scientific microscope; parents are heavily encouraged to follow methodical childrearing regimens to avoid letting "risk" befall the child, for fear of stunting cognitive growth or endangering the child and/or community. As such, the ethos of parenting has undergone a tremendous shift in recent years and, just as parenting shifted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is representative of the cultural conditions of the time. To this end, this thesis offers a discourse analysis of contemporary parenting guides to illuminate the extent to which risk is linked to childrearing knowledge and how the concepts of parenting and adolescence are potentially impacted. Adolescence is specifically examined because of the concentration

of risk ostensibly falling in the adolescent years due to hormonal changes, thus allegedly making the methodical approach of parenting an adolescent more complicated than with a younger child. As parenting guides can serve as “an approximation of the dominant cultural model of raising children” (Quirke, 2006, p. 392), this discourse analysis can help to illuminate how parenting has evolved and what that can mean in terms of the wider landscape of how we understand adolescence and parents’ relationships to their children.

### *Cultural Texts*

This thesis is organized as follows: the remainder of Chapter 1 provides a wider context of how risk and adolescence came to be understood and defined as they are today in mainstream knowledge, introducing risk discourse and its relevance to both parenting and general culture. I discuss how adolescence became a popularized concept and how discourses of risk and science came to be embedded within institutions of education, family, and the marketplace, outlining how and why discourses of risk and science play a significant role in the way(s) adolescents are understood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Chapter 2 lays out the theoretical and methodological frameworks for how I conducted my analyses, as well as how poststructural theory serves as both an investigative and political tool. This chapters offers an explanation on the general logic of this thesis, including a discussion of why discourse analysis is an effective tool for decoding cultural texts. Chapter 3 contains the analyses of the three parenting guides. This chapter illustrates how the language of these texts can both (re)produce and be (re)productive of assumptions regarding parenting and adolescence that are fundamentally entwined with discourses of risk. Chapter 4 discusses the implications of the analyses in Chapter 3. In this concluding chapter, I examine the conceptual understandings of parenting and adolescence in the cultural texts

I consider, including how adulthood serves as the normative counterpoint to the pathological adolescent, how the ‘proper’ image of parent is to be fearful of the ‘disturbed’ adolescent, and how the concepts of both parenting and adolescence rely on the assumed existence of one another to be legible in risk discourse. Lastly, I discuss directions for potential future research.

Within this project, I analyze two parenting guides: *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy* by Michael Bradley (2003), and *Brainstorm* by Daniel Siegel (2015); as well as an online parenting website, *Empowering Parents*, which offers articles from various authors and provides space for reader comments. All of these texts are American-based and were published between 2003 and 2015. I analyze these texts in order to demonstrate how discourses of risk produce and are (re)productive of understandings of parenting and adolescence, and how imperatives of risk, responsibility, and blame shape how adolescents are perceived and the relationships parents are told they should have with their children.

The first text (Bradley) was chosen because it is indicative of dominant discourse in three different aspects. First, its sheer popularity is an example of how these writings are important to consumers. Since the book is marketed towards parents, it can be assumed that the large majority of buyers are parents seeking advice. The book also won five different literature awards, including the 2002 Parents’ Choice Approved Award and The National Parenting Center Seal of Approval, giving evidence of the book’s authoritative position in discussions of parenting. Second, the book refers to teens as “crazy” throughout. The author does differentiate between “insane” (medically diagnosed mental illness) and “crazy” (unpredictable and generally un-adult), but despite this the author deploys an ongoing theme of the absurdity of teenagers that solidifies his initial

point: teenagers are unpredictable and therefore a threat to calculability. Thus, this text was chosen for its explicitly unsubtle depiction of teens as “crazy.” Third, a parenting guide was chosen over other options, such as opinion pieces, because of the link established in this text between professionals considered to be experts, and parents. Put differently, a parenting guide is a text that specifically targets parents in terms of their roles and responsibilities regarding children. This provides a direct representation of how knowledge shapes parents’ understandings of themselves and their children.

The second text (Siegel) was chosen because it exhibits a very different approach from Bradley. Instead of centering on the insanity of adolescence and its stark contrast to adulthood, it focuses more on the emerging adolescent brain. The author describes youth as a transitional time, but does not call adolescents innately crazy or ill. Adolescence, to Siegel, is an important time of creativity and passion, but, if not properly guided by a rational parental figure, adolescence can turn into a destructive force for youths and their communities. Thus, while Siegel operates through subtler and more nuanced discourses of risk than Bradley, he implicitly (re)produces similar themes. Also, Siegel’s text, *Brainstorm* (2013), gained a tremendous amount of mainstream attention and was ranked a *New York Times* best seller.

The third source, the parenting website *Empowering Parents* (empoweringparents.com) was used for two distinct reasons. The articles address specific worries and anxieties of parenting, and are dense with language that normalizes certain discourses. There are, at the time of the analyses of this cultural text, eight different “experts” employed by the site who provide article writing, one-on-one feedback, and program design for their different parent-coaching packages and products. The experts all have university degrees listed, except one who has a LMHC (Licensed Mental Health

Counselor). Five of the experts have Masters of Social Work, one has a PhD in Psychology, and another has a Bachelor's of Sociology. From these degrees, it is clear that the articles at *Empowering Parents* come from a place of education regarding these topics. The website offers the statement “straight talk and real results” as their central phrase and their products are marketed as “sound advice” for parents and caregivers. Furthermore, the website is very proscriptive, often discussing how to “turn around your child’s behaviour, right away”.<sup>1</sup> The website also provides perspectives of parents via the comment section after each article. Parents’ perspectives are useful in decoding how the language is both interpreted and (re)produced in non-expert viewpoints. These three sources, considered together, are effective tools in demonstrating how truth regimes regarding adolescence are produced, and rendered invisible within the current discussions of parenting.

### *Risk in Culture*

Due to the emergence of mass media there are countless new ways for consumers to be exposed to different forms of advice regarding childhood and youth developmental strategies, each commonly espousing their own scientific standpoint. Consequently, parenting is constantly in the limelight of many different intersecting voices, including the media, marketing, and academia; with the best course of action for each individual being obscured by the constant onslaught of perspectives of what is ‘right’ and, perhaps more significantly, what is ‘wrong’. For instance, in the early 1990s the concept of “stranger danger”<sup>2</sup> became a pressing topic for the media and other parenting sources as a constant fear that people should always acknowledge, with media and experts often citing

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from *Empoweringparents.com* “about us” section

<sup>2</sup> Stranger danger pertains to the perceived threat that strangers can present to children.

this apparent danger as a symptom of a negligent society as a whole (Strokes, 2009, p. 14). The circulation of risk in the media contributed to the widespread fear of leaving children unattended at any point of time. From news channels,<sup>3</sup> to popular daytime television (e.g. *Dr. Phil* and his episode entitled *Child Predators* and the corresponding stranger danger ‘how-to’ guide<sup>4</sup>), these anxieties are constantly being (re)produced by various media sources.

Though there are instances of strangers abducting and harming children, which received widespread media attention (Strokes, 2009), it was reported that out of 43743 missing children cases in Canada in 2015, only 24 were cases of stranger abduction (MissingKids.ca, 2016). It is, however, the (re)production of risk within the media’s representation of child abduction that perpetuates stranger danger as a constant fear, and consequently disciplines parents towards compliance with particular risk prevention methods (despite the unlikelihood of child abduction by strangers). ‘Failure’ to utilize these risk-prevention methods has, on various occasions, resulted in police intervention, albeit controversially (e.g. parents being charged with neglect for letting their two children walk home from a park alone;<sup>5</sup> a mother being charged for letting her child play at a park while she worked at a nearby fast food restaurant<sup>6</sup>).

The purpose of these examples is not to discuss the degree to which “stranger danger” is a problem, but instead is to highlight how risk (re)produces the ways we see parenting as a site of constant (self-)policing and discipline through the continual

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.fox10phoenix.com/arizona-news/6931512-story>, accessed December 14, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://drphil.com/articles/article/265>, accessed December, 8, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://kdvr.com/2015/03/03/kids-walking-alone-raises-controversy-causes-debate/>, accessed December 8, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/07/arrested-for-letting-a-9-year-old-play-at-the-park-alone/374436/>, accessed December 8, 2015.



remodeling of what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ parenting. Furthermore, and as discussed below, these examples not only illuminate how parents must manage risk and their identity as parents in relation to risk, but also the nature of risk itself as a modern phenomenon, especially when pertaining to children and youth.

There are countless examples of how risk is a prominent factor in the lives of parents and figures centrally in parenting advice (a recent example of a moral panic surrounding parenting is the anxiety-producing alleged link between vaccinations and autism<sup>7</sup>), and, clearly, there are other associated factors that contribute to these anxieties being produced in the particular ways that they are. What is important, however, is how these narratives serve to further discursively construct parenting as a time of constant risk and risk assessment with the inherent parental responsibility to protect children from any and all risks. Similarly, expert advice composed to help regulate such risks also (re)produces the idea that parenting is supposed to be risky by constructing parenting to be a constant time of choice, responsibility, and blame. Potential (or imagined) threats to the wellbeing of a child are therefore leveraged towards the production of a form of risk management that is identified by expert knowledge, transforming responses to these threats into a series of choices and strategies used to regulated and manage risk. Risk encompasses the identification of a potential threat but also the ways to regulate and control for it, providing an entire way of interpreting parenting and child development that is concentrated on aspects of risk. This type of risk discourse, borrowing from Deborah Lupton (2013), first gained momentum in the early 1990s and has since been embedded in the vast majority of institutions in most (if not all) advanced industrial

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/09/17/the-gops-dangerous-debate-on-vaccines-and-autism/>, accessed on December 13, 2015.

countries as a fundamental part of how we make sense of the world and subsequently how we react within it.

### **Risk as Discourse: *An Everyday Rationale***

Though risk is often used by experts with particular intent (e.g., “at-risk” youth), risk is also a larger, more pervasive concept (Lupton, 2013). Risk has become a widespread idea that is often exemplified by certain cultural anxieties and worries that are prominent at a particular time. These worries discursively produce a matrix of choices as to how one should navigate each risk, thereby constructing a series of behaviours that are entwined with risk management. As a result, almost any anxiety pertaining to childrearing can be reduced to a risk and the corresponding risk management behaviours. For a specific example, and to draw upon the “stranger danger” phenomenon earlier described (Scott, Jackson, & Backett-Milburn, 1998), parents are continuously made aware of this risk through media, parenting advice texts, and peers. Parents who fail to observe the prescribed preemptive strategies (e.g., keeping their child vigilantly supervised, being wary of strangers, purchasing devices such as cell phones to keep constant communication) can be considered negligent (Scott, Jackson, & Backett-Milburn, 1998). Thus, the risk of stranger danger produces commonplace parenting choices aimed at managing risk. These choices are normalized into ‘common sense’ parenting, which serves to manifest the risk as something that appears imminent unless carefully controlled.

From parenting to youth development practitioners, overarching worries of risk are constructed through notions of responsibility and blame, anchored to a cultural fixation on predictability. Therefore, risk is a concept used as a regulation tool to

“transform a radically indeterminate cosmos into a manageable one, through the myth of calculability” (Lupton, 2013, p. 7). These discursive risks, despite being attempts to “tame uncertainty,” dominate anxieties around childhood and youth development, circulating and (re)producing in expert knowledge within education, labour, health, familial relations, law, markets, and so on (Scott, Jackson, & Bracket-Bilburn, 1998; Tait, 1993). Various experts, such as psychologists and educators, identify these risks, creating a fabric of knowledges that dictates how citizens should navigate their (and their children’s) lives. These knowledges are (re)produced in commonplace settings, making it seem necessary that people adhere to such advice lest they suffer the imagined consequences. Parenting guides, for instance, exemplify expert authority on child and youth development that (re)produces ideas and perspectives about childhood and adolescence. These forms of knowledge have overlapping influences from education, media, medicine, and the marketplace, and as a result risk discourse can operate within different institutions as implicit and (generally) unquestioned. As such, risk is woven into foundational elements of institutions like parenting and education, where young people can be “measured against a graded, cumulative, and importantly, calculable set of ‘normal’ risks- both by their age category, and by the severity of the risk involved” (Tait, 1993, p. 3). Different worries of potential risk, then, are rendered into normalized conditions of childhood and adolescence and influence the ways people make decisions about the children for whom they care. Risk discourse produces cultural anxieties that frame how citizens ‘choose’ their childrearing practices. In this way, risk is embedded into the contemporary cultural fabric of knowing and being; a state of modernity Beck (1992) describes as *risk society*.

### *Parenting as a Social Identity*

Risk society, a condition that emerged from the influx of scientific thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, is the state in which risk is infused within intellectual, political, and social discourse that both normalizes and disciplines those within risk societies' cultural influence (Beck, 1992). It is a "culture of scientism" that imposes social identifications with "particular social institutions and their ideologies" that construct "rational frames of modern social control" (p. 3). As such, risk is rooted in the ways people live their lives on a foundational level; education, medicine, familial relations, definitions of sanity, sexual behaviour, and so on are all constructed in part with tropes of risk as a guiding social imperative. Parenting, or more specifically, the identity of a parent, is embedded within narratives of risk, as risk society produces parents as social actors that parallel the particular sensibilities of what parenting is *meant to be* at that time. These sensibilities are fluid, and discursively shift with the expert authorities that espouse knowledges that generally correspond with the current political, economic, and social intelligibilities. As a result, 'what is right' is in a constant state of re-modification.

For example, in the 1990s ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder) became a prevalent concern among parents, as it was seen as a disruption to 'normal' childhood development. Doctors recommended that parents, caregivers, and teachers should closely watch their young ones, as many symptoms "may not be apparent in a doctor's office" (Miller & Ledger, 2003, p. 22). In this context, the discursive risks associated with ADHD enhanced a sense of responsibility among parents to keep a vigilant eye out for apparent glitches in the developmental process. As such, experts configure a set of ideas about childhood, while providing a series of behaviours and attitudes for parents to follow if they want to identify as 'good' parents. Parental responsibility to 'remedy' ADHD was,

therefore, closely tied to parental blame as the onus was put on parents to be proactive about the surveillance and regulation of these apparent afflictions. As a result, behaviour that could be interpreted as a symptom of ADHD was often met with medical intervention (Malacrida, 2001). This contributed to the prescribed use of Ritalin, a drug used to suppress ADHD's symptoms, pushing the number of users up from 15,000 children in the 1970s to 3.5 million by 1997 (Miller & Ledger, 2003, p. 22). The immense increase of Ritalin prescriptions marks the apex of a moral panic; parents were terrified of the perceived risk of youth to the point that they used the 'knowledge' (diagnoses) prescribed by the expert (doctor) to regulate and restrain. As mentioned earlier, risk, as a form of social control, is apparent in almost all institutions, but the way this is particularly produced for non-adults is also largely due to the way young people are socially constructed as vulnerable and constantly in need of this brand of adult control. It is not simply the over diagnosis of ADHD or the awareness of "stranger danger" that produces parenting as a time of risk management, or children to be inherently risky, but it is the various institutions working in conjunction with one another that (re)produces these discursive conditions. The identification, and therefore the creation of the risks, is a manifestation of the influence of risk discourse, rendering these particular behaviours (e.g. hyperactivity/strangers around children) as threats to children's wellbeing. Therefore, when these risks are circulated throughout cultural texts (i.e. media, education, parenting guides), the associated discursive powers (re)produce the acknowledgment of these risks and the behaviours to mitigate them. Though ADHD and stranger danger are simply cases of risk discourse at work, there are many other, more implicit avenues that (re)produce these discursive influences as normalized and commonplace. The marketplace, the development of science into everyday life, and the standardization of

educational testing are all examples of institutions and practices that use concepts of risks in ways that have produced the discursive effects considered in this thesis.

### **The Marketing of Risk**

The marketplace is a central avenue along which risk (and the imagined protection from risk) can be bought and sold as everyday products, especially within advertisement campaigns that focus primarily on the wellness benefit of a particular product (Cote & Allahar, 2006). Different health foods, educational toys, self-help guides, and countless other products can potentially defend against particular risks (e.g. obesity; ‘proper’ development; ‘control’ over one’s psyche, respectively). Due to discourses of risk, however, the spectrum of choices and the advertised ‘rationalities’ of each product construct some products to be improper for positive development and are therefore products a ‘good’ parent would not buy. The ways that these products are represented, both through marketing campaigns and discursive trends, (re)produce risk as a significant factor in the ‘choices’ that are being made, especially when it comes to a population that is commonly understood as innately vulnerable such as children and youth. Due to this perceived vulnerability, marketing campaigns have particularly targeted non-adults by producing a rhetoric that appeals to the ‘natural’ state of youthfulness while simultaneously selling the products that will help represent that (Cote & Allahar, 2006).

This marketing of identity tropes produces of a matrix of ‘choices’ that cohere with prescribed identities, and it is through these processes that risk influences people’s purchasing practices, thereby shaping people’s choices to cohere with what is expected of each age bracket (e.g. children), gender (e.g. dolls vs. trucks), role in society (e.g. parent),

and so on. The marketing of advice texts (and countless other products<sup>8</sup>) works in similar ways. Parenting guides, in this way, are devices of both the institutions of the marketplace and of science, linking science into a product to be bought or sold by consumers. As a result, narratives of ‘good’ parenting become the products to be sold, and science is utilized as the justification (and certainty) of these claims.

Childhood and youth are marketed as different images through purchasable products that can meet the designed characteristics of what these age groups should look like. As consumerism, through media, became more and more pronounced in the daily lives of parents and their children, “young people have been increasingly encouraged to think within the narrow confines of personal materialism and consumerism, from which big business is the principle beneficiary” (Cote & Allahar, 2006, p. 83). As such, parenthood is conceptually sutured to certain forms of consumerism.

From various baby-specific clothing brands to educational television programming marketed to stimulate a young person’s brain, childhood is “embedded in an all-encompassing product universe through which children’s identity is negotiated in terms of consumer choice” (Langer, 2002, p. 70). Clearly, it is the parents who are the intended audience, but it is children that constitute the central imperative to purchase and consume in specific ways. Childhood, as a concept, is often understood as a time of vulnerability and dependence (Malkki, 2010), linking sensibilities of risk to the ways

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<sup>8</sup> Magazines and other forms of cultural texts are “specifically engineered to create a consciousness” (Cote & Allahar, 2005, p. 105) among the intended consumers that serves to create a need for that product by those same consumers. These ‘needs’ include aesthetics such as fashion and hair products, but also “elements of an identity that [consumers] have also been encouraged to crave,” including the image of the apathetic, ‘cool,’ teenager and/or the (counter?) culture rebel portrayed in other media sources. These identities, which some call “identity products” are sold through media outlets such as television, magazines, books and even music with economic interests of consumption the end goal by the marketers. Though advice texts do not explicitly construct visible identities to embody as a fashion magazine would, for instance, they provide sets of behaviours and demeanors that cater to the same principles of marketing.

rational adults consider the types of consumption they allow for their children, including media. For instance, the popular show Teletubbies, featuring bright colours and organic shapes said to increase babies' cognitive function, totaled \$20 billion in sales in 1999 from toys, clothing, and accessories (Linn, 2004, p. 48). Victoria Bushell, one of the leading forces behind the Teletubbies reboot in 2015, called the show a "global phenomenon" and attributed its success to children "learning through laughter" and to the "huge, proven benefits of learning to be yourself, communicating expression and simply having fun with others" (Huffington Post, 2015, p. 1). In fact, both PBS Parents<sup>9</sup> and BBC<sup>10</sup> (under the name *CBeebies*) supply parenting techniques and advice that help prevent developmental problems (e.g. an article entitled *How to Raise a Good Citizen* [Ankowski & Ankowski, 2015]) with the former even having a "child development tracker" so parents can know the most beneficial television program for the specific age group of their children. Clearly, part of the marketing of these products involves reassuring parents that these programs have educational value compared to other television shows.<sup>11</sup>

As further discussed in Chapter 3, risk discourse does not only influence and shape practices to mitigate specific understood 'threats'; it also entails how people should be continuously vigilant of any and all potential future threats. In this sense, risk management is a constant pursuit by parents, one organized around the imperative to prepare for *any* future risk. That is not to say that parents should not strive to expose their

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.pbs.org/parents/> Accessed on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.cbeebies.com/global/> Accessed on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> PBS Parents, for example, gives a list of types of programs to avoid, coupled with suggestions from their network that encourages specific types of growth (i.e. self esteem). <http://www.pbs.org/parents/childrenandmedia/tvviewersguide-grade.html> accessed February 1st, 2016.



children to media that encourages positive development (for example); instead, narratives of ‘proper’ choice versus irresponsible choice perpetuate certain assumptions of ‘good’ parenting that are intimately linked with an ability to vigilantly control the forms of consumption a child receives, including media. Failure to do this could warrant a certain level of parental blame and potential future risk of negative development for a seemingly neglected child. As such, when *CBeebies* and other educational tools for parents promote healthy growth without explicitly utilizing concepts of risk, they are still implicitly (re)producing concepts of parenting and childhood that are influenced by wider discourses of risk.

The use of proper childhood and youth development rhetoric in the marketing of products discursively (re)produces certain concepts of childhood and youth. The rudimentary ways we consider young peoples’ exposure to products is tightly aligned with systems of scientific technologies, in a way that positions children as constructs of particular regimented evaluations. As such, “technical experts [childhood development experts] are given a pole position to define agendas [forms of consumption] and impose bounding premises *a priori* on risk discourses” (Beck, 1992, p. 4, emphasis in original). Parenting, in this vein, is dictated by those who hold the authoritative position of childhood development knowledge, and they are therefore also positioned to construct the boundaries within which people must act if they are to cohere with the cultural intelligibilities of good parenting. With the marketplace being able to sell commodities that corresponded with these cultural intelligibilities, a “good mother [comes] to be equated with good shopping, and good shopping [is] understood as rational” (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 42). Therefore, risk, responsibility, and blame are central to the way

parents make choices about their child's consumption practices, creating a nexus between 'proper' parental choice and fluctuations of marketplace trends (Langer, 2002).

Understanding the nuances of the marketplace not only shows how and why people consume the way they do, it also highlights how certain discourses (re)produce cultural tendencies that shape how people perceive the world. The ways children's products are marketed, for instance, illuminate the cultural fixations with their vulnerabilities coupled with the imperative for parents to protect their children by purchasing properly, whether it be specific foods, educational toys, or advice texts. More specifically, the marketplace illustrates how discourses of risk can be embedded into seemingly mundane things, including our consumption patterns.

Like the rise of the public child discussed earlier, the development of the marketplace as we know it today was also intimately linked with scientific developments regarding childhood and youth wellbeing (Burnham, 1996; Olsen, 2014). The child, who was seen previously as the sole responsibility of the parent (i.e. the mother) shifted into the realm of experts and teachers as they assumed the authority of how to raise young ones in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Parents still had the onus of responsibility; it simply molded into the responsibility of being up-to-date with the experts' opinions and advice as to what is best for minors, as it was argued that parental ignorance was the leading cause of disaster befalling children (Burnham, 1996). Thus, the commonplace reliance on empirical methods to ensure positive youth development became the norm and the starting point for the social construction of how we see children and youth. Furthermore, the transitioning pedagogical approaches of the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the (re)production of risk discourse, and in conjunction with the marketplace, constructed risk as central to understandings of childhood and youth.

### *Empiricism within Childhood and Youth Development*

The emergence of the “public child” was a brand-new way of looking at children that required ‘expert’ knowledge to safely manage the hazards of childhood (Gleason, 2005). Scientific conceptualizations of childhood and youth transformed parenting into a series of empirical methods. Risk, in this way, became a governing instrument for parents to both make sense of, and react to, potential hazards identified by experts. Concomitantly, institutions sought comprehensive ways to identify and control for risks in ways that became standardized and commonplace.

To this day, schools, and other educational programs, evaluate young peoples’ mental aptitude using a series of tests, including IQ testing, personality exams, and other empirical methods in order to set apart those who are more statistically likely to be “at risk”<sup>12</sup> (Bessant 2001). This ‘science of risk’ has, in some ways, taken the place of older categories of research, such as ‘delinquency’ and “maladjustment,” and replaced them with a system that can efficiently identify an “at risk” individual. When an ‘at-risk’ student is pinpointed, intervention is often recommended lest the student fall prey to “negative developmental outcomes, difficulties in social adaptations, academic success, and mental health” (Children and Youth at Risk Symposium Report, 2000, p. 7). Though there are exceptions (Hartmann, 2003), the methods are generally based on objective, empirical data—literally reducing the anxieties of potential risks in/of kids into calculable and scientific strategies. As such, institutions that encompass childhood and youth development, like education, serve as nodes of contact through which risk discourse

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<sup>12</sup> The category of “at risk” youth is defined as “kids who live in a negative environment or lack skills and values necessary to thrive in our society, placing them at-risk for developing serious problem behaviours” (Collingwood, 1997, p. 3)

circulates as foundational to the ways childhood and youth are conceptually understood. This was not an instant reform or revolution; instead, it came to be from the gradual construction, popularization, and implementation of child and youth developmental strategies that grew into prevalence.

More specifically, two main events took place that illustrate how youth development came to become largely dictated by empirical methods. First, the advent and popularization of a standardized testing system within schools as a way to ‘measure’ the imagined potential of young students made it seem both realistic and beneficial to render each and every potential risk knowable, calculable, and therefore preventable. Second, the emergence of youth development psychology (particularly as espoused by G. Stanley Hall), and the resulting understanding of the adolescent as emotionally unstable, influenced how people thought of young people and consequently the roles adolescents were expected to adopt within communities (Olsen, 2014). Moreover, these examples articulate how contemporary communities grew to include youth development as a central rationale for risk prevention. Both of these events, alongside the growing significance of the marketplace within media, demonstrate how risk became central to how people understood childhood and youth, and, as a result, how new assumptions concerning youth and youth development are naturalized.

#### *Development of Risk as a Tool*

The concept of adolescence is historically situated as part of the emergence of human development science in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This concept, despite being adopted by both academics and the public sphere as a mundane piece of language, has not been inspected with a critical lens until relatively recently (Olsen, 2014; Cote & Allahar,

2006). Adolescence, both in the context it was constructed and as we know it today, was the result of a series of scientific progressions that focused on identifying and labeling people in attempts to create empirically verifiable archetypes. The first attempt to systemically diagnose peoples' development occurred with the construction of the Intelligence Quotient, or the IQ test (Gould, 1981). While there were previously abandoned forms of 'scientifically' diagnosing intelligence, such as the incredibly problematic techniques of craniology (Stanfield, 1995), IQ testing remains in favour of many institutions to this day (Slobogin, 2014). Ironically, the creator of the IQ test, Alfred Binet, forewarned against the use of the IQ test as a tool to measure people for their innate mental ability, but these words were disregarded as the IQ test became profitable.

Lewis Terman soon adopted the test and started mass-marketing the renamed Stanford-Binet scale, and it became the archetype for all future versions of the IQ test<sup>13</sup> (Reynolds, 2007; Gould 1981). Unlike Binet's version of the IQ test, the Stanford-Binet scale was advertised to be a standardized exam that all students should undergo in order to gauge their intelligence. With the newly emerging emphasis on science in human development, standardized testing became widely understood as important for children's general welfare.

The test, due to this general acceptance, became the foundation of a multimillion-dollar industry, and shortly after World War I<sup>14</sup> it became a standard with school administrations all over the United States. This style of 'regulating' child development

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<sup>13</sup> Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Fourth Edition (WISC-IV); Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales, Fifth Edition (SB5); Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scales (RIAS); Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ III) Tests of Cognitive Ability (Reynolds, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> It was R.M. Yerkes who first implemented mass testing, but it was done on soldiers when recruiting for the First World War. It was later administered to students as a general practice (Gould, 1981).

was understood as a way that psychologists, who gained a position of high regard in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, could use their childhood development expertise, rooted in empirical and seemingly unbiased science. In fact, Terman even went as far as saying IQ tests could reveal more about a child than his or her mother might know:

The forty minute test has told more about the mental ability of this boy than the intelligent mother had been able to learn in eleven years of daily and hourly observation. For X is feeble-minded; he will never complete the grammar school; he will never be an efficient worker or a responsible citizen (Terman, 1916, found in Gould, 1981, p. 209).

Thus, ‘objective’ science was perceived as a ‘proper’ way of understanding the social and mental realities of children in a way that was previously unknown, therefore also devaluing much of what people thought they knew about childrearing and youth education. As a result, drawing on scientific understandings of childrearing became the only ‘responsible way’ of successfully raising a child, and to disregard the most novel and leading scientific parenting knowledge was to also be a neglectful parent (Burnham, 1996). As a result, psychologists and other scientists who studied child and youth development moved into the spotlight of both academia and the public sphere as they were understood as the only way of *truly* understanding their young ones.

Through the lens of science, risk became a constant that paradoxically defined the state of childrearing (i.e. childrearing ultimately being simply risk management) while simultaneously producing childhood as inherently risky. It was not only the proliferation of empirical methods concerning child development that caused this transition; in addition, various experts sought to create a scientific definition of what exactly childhood and youth entailed, contributing to the concept of youth being risky and vulnerable. For a paramount example, G. Stanley Hall’s work regarding adolescence was greatly applauded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a pioneering pursuit to identify and categorize different

aspects of the human condition; it was his work and the associated assumptions that greatly influenced the way youth were assumed to exist objectively, emotionally, and legally (Shanahan, Erickson, & Bauer, 2005).

### *Managing Youth Pathology through Science*

In G. Stanley Hall's influential work<sup>15</sup>, in which he coined the word adolescence, he discussed how adolescents are emotional subjects in need of constant guidance or disastrous results will occur, as evident in his theory of storm and stress (Olsen, 2014; Hall, 1972). Storm and stress theory<sup>16</sup> constructs adolescents as subjects of intense emotional instability; they are expected to descend into deviancy unless they are carefully regulated and controlled by professionals and parents. Whenever adolescents violate particular 'adult' social constraints, the adolescents themselves can be diagnosed as pathological due to the innate and ever-present biological afflictions that youths are understood to be enduring (Baum, 1976). Hall also made a parallel between criminals and adolescents, arguing that both are regressive in nature and genetically prone to deviance, marking a cultural connection to how and why scholars since have often considered adolescents as a 'problem' to be remedied. Although this way of understanding criminals has long since been problematized and discarded by most in contemporary times, adolescents are still often described as animalistic or unevolved by both experts and the public (Cote & Allahar, 2005). In this way, Hall medicalized the process of emerging into adulthood, constructing it as one that can be surveyed and regulated as long as there is

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<sup>15</sup> Hall's influence on contemporary discourse is only touched on in this thesis, but represents a much larger conversation. His work haunts many aspects of adolescent development, race, criminology, and concepts of normalcy in contemporary times (Cote & Allahar, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Hall's theory of Storm and stress is a sense of "emotional instability associated between opposite feelings (i.e. inertness and excitement, pleasure and pain, etc.), resting primarily within the individual rather than culture (Cote & Allahar, 2006, p. 16).

control by professionals, parents, and any other institutionally-controlled facilities (e.g. juvenile hall).

His approach was soon emulated and followed up by other experts who utilized such scientific methods surrounding youth and children upbringing, who stressed that “happy” emotions were the key for higher intelligence for children and adolescents, and therefore also success (Stearns, 2010). As such, when IQ testing became a standardized procedure in schools, a lower IQ could be an indication of an emotionally distraught subject, therefore indicating that an intervention should take place. Anxious parents would eagerly observe how their children would fare in the ‘real world,’ and if the results were somewhat unsatisfactory than they would align their children into a path that would fit their imagined capabilities (Bessant, 2001).

In the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, consumer culture related to children grew dramatically, as marketers started to advertise to young people as emotionally instable and disconnected subjects, and soon realized that parents could be coaxed into seeking material products as a solution to their “troubled” youth (Matt, 2002). In fact, many professionals and experts encouraged parents to buy more for their children, manifesting ideas that consumerism might ease children’s and youths’ emotional woes (Stearns, 2010). As discussed earlier, toys, clothing, and other consumer goods were marketed to suggest that they would help the development of children if parents ‘cared’ enough to help their children. It was stressed that it was a parental responsibility to raise their children with particular vigilance in order to ensure that their children would conquer the newly founded psychological enemies of upbringing, such as low IQ and lack of emotional control (Stearns, 2010; Malkki, 2010). Risk, in this sense, was marshaled to



justify and market the vast array of commodities and to legitimize the leading experts advocating this scientific conceptualization of adolescence.

In a few short decades, proper childhood upbringing became common conversation among parents, experts, and teachers alike, with ‘objectivity’ as the central epistemological premise. Expert advice related to child and youth rearing flooded the market to the point that, in the American professional class of the 1930s, 90% of mothers and 65% of fathers read childrearing advice manuals, filled with various techniques to teach youth to “conquer” their emotional dilemmas (Matt, 2002, p. 12). Due to youth being understood as fundamentally pathological, any intervention or regulation placed on them was easily regarded to be for his or her own ‘good,’ whatever the opinion of the youth.

With childrearing advice manuals flooding the consumer world, it soon became clear that parenting guides could tap into a profitable market, and as a result a symbiotic relationship developed between various forms of childrearing advice and the marketing of everyday, mundane products (Kenway & Bullen, 2001). For example, Post’s Shredded Wheat made the claim in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that the naturalness of their product was the key to positive childhood development, and the failure to supply these kinds of products to developing bodies could “cause the wrong propensities and desires in children” (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 40). Thus, something as trivial as the cereal parents do, or do not, allow their child to consume is intertwined with notions of responsibility to make ‘proper’ choices from the range of available commodities. Consequently, the lines between marketing, media, and choice became blurred. Furthermore, the emerging researchers that championed the scientific pursuits about childhood and youth (i.e. Hall, Freud, Erikson, etc.) legitimized the idea that particular

products that used ‘scientifically grounded’ principles were the ‘proper’ choices for any good parent.

As widespread standardized testing and objective methods pertaining to child and youth development became normalized within education, ‘scientific’ strategies for parenting began to be understood as acceptable and a mark of a functioning family (Gleason, 2005). Due to the perception that childhood and adolescence could be measured empirically to decide the proper regulation and intervention strategies, childrearing shifted away from being understood on a case-by-case basis to a series of predetermined characteristics and behaviours that are typical for those in each respective age bracket.<sup>17</sup> Risk, as a way to render adolescence and childhood into scientifically manageable choices parents can understand and make, became fundamentally linked to knowledge and advice pertaining to development strategies often in the form of texts like parenting guides. As a result, discourses of risk became attached to those viewed as non-adults, as the “culture of scientism” subjugates youth into particular roles within our community due to the meanings that childhood and adolescence carry (Beck, 1992). As elaborated on in Chapters 3 and 4, the cultural meaning placed on adolescents also assumes a cultural meaning of parents as the managers of adolescents, influencing understandings of ‘proper’ relationships between parents and their teenage children.

### **Conclusion: Institutionalized Risk**

Within this chapter, I discussed how risk is produced and naturalized by and through overlapping institutional pressures that originated from various cultural and

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<sup>17</sup> There are many programs that depart from this way of thinking in modern times, actively acknowledging that they consider child and youth development on the individual basis (Hartmann, 2003). However, they have to highlight this in their policy and mission statements simply because it is alternative to the normalized way programs, education, and culture in general understands youth and childhood development.

social factors. IQ testing illustrated the standardization of childhood development through a ‘scientific’ lens that shifted the parental perspective of how to manage their children. Similarly, the invention and widespread use of the concept of adolescence, sutured with preconditions of risk, highlights how expert knowledge started to transform the relationship between parents and youth, altering youth development as a whole into a cultural phenomenon that rests upon expert knowledge. Risk, in both of these cases, was used a managerial tool for indicating why these scientific developments were paramount in fostering health and safety, resulting in a discursive link between science and proper childhood and adolescent development. Due to the influence of these discursive pressures, adolescence is largely produced as a cultural concept by and through various institutions in which discourses of risk operates as both normalized and invisible. As these intersecting institutions crystalize risk in contemporary discourse, they also construct specific assumptions of both adolescence and parenting, with the latter being normalized in relation to the pathologized former, as I discuss in greater depth in Chapters 3 and 4. As parenting ‘science’ became a fundamental part of how education, families, and the marketplace approached childrearing, parenting guides became more and more central to how expert advice is mobilized. In the upcoming chapter, I discuss the way(s) parenting guides can be deconstructed to illuminate the discourses at work as well as how poststructuralism is an effective lens for understanding the impact discourses have on how we perceive parenting and adolescence.

## Chapter 2: Methodology & Theoretical Approaches

The institution of science discursively operates as a regime of truth that produces cultural assumptions as objective fact. The way risk operates within these regimes renders unpredictable circumstances into manageable choices, which serve to (re)produce culturally manifested anxieties into ways that people can (and seemingly should) navigate their lives. More specifically, in this Chapter I depart from the commonly held notion that science operates in a separate sphere from society and culture, one that is free from human bias and subjectivity. Instead, I hold the position that “science is *part of* culture, and inseparable from it” (Martin, 2012, p. 161, emphasis in original). I contend that discourses of science and risk link a sense of objectivity to certain cultural assumptions, including how we understand and make decisions regarding childhood and youth development. These assumptions are produced by and are (re)productive of institutionalized logics that both shape how we understand and manage our (and our children’s) lives and obfuscate other perspectives that do not cohere with these logics. Moreover, I will argue that parenting guides serve as a point of entry for discourses of science and risk to produce and (re)produce concepts of parenting and adolescence as seemingly natural and healthy.

### *Knowledge & Risk*

Institutionalized understandings of risk are actively produced into “the form of *scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it*” (Martin, 2012, p.163, emphasis in original). As a result, ‘proper’ decision making is often associated with a certain level of scientific reasoning when considering risk. Effectively managing risk, in this way, requires the same institutional logic that identified the risk in the first place (Kelly, 2000,

such as using ‘scientifically’ prescribed Ritalin for ‘scientifically’ suspected ADHD symptoms (Miller & Ledger, 2003). Due to the power of discourse, resistance to these ideas is often understood as naive, ignorant, or neglectful, especially if the resistance comes from outside the institutionalized logic that formulated these concepts of risk (Lupton, 2013), such as refusing ‘scientifically’ prescribed Ritalin *despite* ‘scientifically’ suspected ADHD symptoms (Miller & Ledger, 2003).

In this light, “the erasure of contingency implied by the scientific worldview in large part fortifies its cultural privilege” (Martin, 2012, p. 179), and, like many processes of normalization, leaves little room for epistemological variations. As such, “phenomena that will not fit the box are often not seen at all” (Ryan, 2015, p. 420). Resistance to these ideas, for instance, often becomes understood as alternative to the dominant ways of knowing and is not understood as ‘truth.’ Resistance is therefore commonly dismissed as potential knowledge. That is not to say that dominant discourses are not in contention with other worldviews; the sheer objectivity of science as an investigative tool can overshadow the potentially less-conclusive outcome of a scientific study. Regardless, in contemporary culture, science is often referred to as one homogenous entity that lacks a distinction between the methodology of science and scientific claims (Tait, 1993; Ryan, 2015). This both blurs the lines between science as a method and science as a perspective more generally and (re)produces the latter as seemingly more truthful than alternative viewpoints. As such, understandings that fall outside of the perceived objectivity that discourses of science espouse are understood to be formulated in an entirely different logic, and, as a result, discourses of science are reinforced as a normalized perspective. These assumptions and powers, despite being crystallized as part of a unilateral and

natural ‘truth,’ must be critiqued in order to expose the ways in which the dominant discourses produce unexamined tropes often understood as normal.

Therefore, this project focuses on decentering the concepts and assumptions dominant powers naturalize as a normal part of living in contemporary culture and are potentially invisible without a critical lens (Lemert, 1994). More specifically, poststructuralist theory takes up dominant political discourse, often through intellectual work such as deconstructing text and language, to “transgress the subject matter it interprets by constantly reflecting on the necessity and nature of the interpretation itself” (p. 269). By examining the points of entry for knowledge in cultural texts utilizing a poststructuralist lens, I deconstruct the ways that language (re)produces and naturalizes cultural understandings of adolescent development.

### **Poststructuralism: *Uncovering Meaning within Language***

Poststructuralism can mean potentially different things to those who follow different variants that are utilized by prominent scholars such as Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Althusser, and Foucault (Weedon, 1987). The authors do, however, share a similar set of fundamental assumptions about language, meaning, and subjectivity. Language, in particular, is vital for all veins of poststructuralism as the knowledge that is represented within language is what helps us make sense of our culture and influences how particular subjects are produced. Cultural texts (re)produce these knowledges through the language that is used, potentially influencing how we understand ourselves and our roles within culture.

For example, Jette (2006) conducted a poststructuralist discourse analysis on a column in a women’s exercise magazine that discusses workout and diet tips for pregnant

women. The column was intended to help women achieve a “fit” pregnancy (p. 339). The rhetoric used by the magazine associated a ‘proper’ pregnancy with a mother who vigilantly followed all of the training and diet advice provided in the magazine. This implicitly indicates that a mother who does not follow these suggestions is an “unfit mother before her child is even born” (p. 341). The pregnant women, in these cases, are risky due to the perceived threat lethargy can have on mothers’ unborn children, and it is centrally (and constantly) the responsibility of mothers to make the choices prescribed by this magazine. As a result, motherhood, as a social construct, is discursively linked to the knowledges that this text espouses as ‘truth,’ thereby reifying a certain concept of motherhood to be ‘proper’ and healthy. Furthermore, these notions of a ‘proper’ motherhood exist only in relation to the fetal child, linking childhood concepts of vulnerability and risk to the choices mothers make.

Discourses of risk, in these cases, influence both how childhood is understood to be fundamentally associated with risk and how parenting is characterized by the regulation, prevention, and intervention of risk that childhood encompasses. Put differently, the narratives of parenting considered by Jette (2006) position exercise during pregnancy as a way to offset the apparent risk of parental inactivity for an unborn baby, rendering pregnancy as a constellation of risks to be constantly managed by the choices mothers make. As such, pregnancy is (re)produced to encompass notions of risk, responsibility, and blame through the ways women are supposed to conduct themselves and, more importantly, how they are supposed to properly care for their (unborn) children. Language, in this sense, normalizes certain kinds of pregnancy, thus providing a means of social control through the knowledges that dictate what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong.’

Knowledge *produces* how we interpret reality through the language that is utilized, shaping how people identify choices (e.g. risk and blame) and how to ‘properly’ navigate them (e.g. the ways people should ‘properly’ be pregnant). Considering this, poststructuralists are not concerned in suggesting new, prescriptive ways of (re)producing knowledge (e.g. new ways of understanding motherhood). Instead, they:

are concerned with the insurrection of knowledges that are opposed primarily not to the contents, methods or concepts of science, but to the effects of the centralizing powers which are linked to the institution and functioning of an organized scientific discourse within a society such as ours (Foucault, 1994, p. 43).

The knowledges being invoked, therefore, produce a discursive imprint on the social fabric in which *all* institutions operate; though, because many of these knowledges are normalized as common place, it is only within the ruptures that we can identify discourses at work. For Foucault, these ruptures are easiest to identify through historically walking back through discourses to investigate how different systems of knowledge become authenticated in particular institutions, and how discourses are contested and obscured as understandings of ‘truth’ shift.

### *Social Constructs of Risk*

Bodies “are constituted within the specific nexus of culture or discourse/power regimes, and that there is no materiality or ontological independence of the body outside of any one of those specific regimes” (Butler, 1989, p. 602). Bodies are thus nodal points of productive power that can be actively disciplined in adherence with a set of discursive conditions. Meaning (i.e. truthfulness, knowledge) is produced through bodies, and in reflex, constructs those bodies as cultural icons – culturally intelligible texts – that are normalized through the systems of knowledge that shape and constrain how we



understand the world. To illustrate this concept, let us consider the development of hysteria beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Hysteria, which developed to be perceived as a pathological condition of a woman's mind was attributed to the inability to control these feelings due to a "disease of the nerves" (Foucault, 1965, p. 142). The myth of hysteria linked a woman's body with both physiological characteristics and moral values, and, despite no physical evidence, it was theorized that this disease occurred in connection to the internal movements of the womb and uterus (organs exclusive to female physiology).

More to the point, the female body was *given meaning* and therefore became subject to science, subsuming women within the sphere of medical intervention (Weedon, 1987). Womanhood was discursively reified as fundamentally at risk of pathology, which served to render particular behaviours problematic under a medical lens. To this end, even female bodily functions such as menstruation were viewed as pathological, and served as justification for women to be excluded from many male-dominated spaces (Vertinsky, 1999). The medicalization of the female body served as a point of social control from the language that linked women's apparent wellbeing to discourses of gender, risk, science, and others.

This "process of *hysterization*" as an example provides more than just an instance where science was entwined with cultural assumptions that existed at that time (Weedon 1987, p. 108, emphasis in original). It also serves to illustrate how scientific language not only produces an authentic 'truth', but also how the subject position of woman is linked to institutional logics that influence how people understand femininity as a whole. As such, "practices systematically form the objects of which they speak" which, in turn, shape perspectives to cohere with the respective institutionalized logic (Mills, 2004, p. 15). The ideals of femininity were actively shaped as natural through the influx of

‘expert’ knowledge that intersected what Foucault calls the “psychological effect of a moral fault” (Foucault, 1965, p. 158). As such, discourses of gender were linked to what was thought to be biologically grounded afflictions within the mind.

For another example of how discourse both shapes and (re)produces concepts such as gender and childhood, Brown & Penney (2014) investigated the types of reactions people had after a 16-year-old girl undertook a solo-sailing circumnavigation and how discourses of risk, age, and gender played a prominent role in these reactions. The authors found that many of the reactions were specifically tied to gendered values regarding the forms of risk management the sailor’s parents should have undergone (e.g. “a boy sailing around the world can do it, but a young lady is very vulnerable indeed” [p. 278]). The language within these responses used risk as a way to define both the young sailor’s capabilities and how her parents should understand and react to these risk-taking decisions in ways that corresponds with her age and gender. Simply put, the reactions to this event characterized the sailor as more at-risk due to her being a female and her parents as blameworthy for not taking these factors into account and controlling the risk in an ‘appropriate’ way. This example both illuminates how risk serves to shape concepts of gender by the way risk is identified and managed and how concepts of childhood influence the degree to which parents are constructed as culpable for not engaging in risk regulation and control. In this light, a sense of morality is placed on concepts of risk, age, and gender that define parameters of appropriate behaviours and choices.

Similar to how the term hysteria embedded a specific pathological meaning on women, I contend that parenting guides are capable of (re)producing discourse. As I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, the language utilized in parenting guides produces and

(re)produces specific meanings of parents, adolescents, and their expected relationship to one another through discourses of risk.

### *Agency in Poststructuralism*

Perhaps one of the most prominent critiques of poststructuralism is the underlying question of the extent to which subjects have agency. For instance, Judith Butler, arguably the first scholar to introduce poststructuralism into feminist theory,<sup>18</sup> was scrutinized for grounding agency in a subject's ability to take up various established discourses rather than being able to 'create' discourses, therefore completely rejecting any aspect of a prediscursive subject (Barvosa-Carter, 2001). In other words, Butler (as well as other poststructuralist scholars), contends that behaviours and conditions of the subject "are performative and socially constructed in and through the repetition of already given signs of norms," leaving no ability to act independently of culturally produced alignments (Barvosa-Carter, 2001, p. 125). To this end, Seyla Benhabib, a long-time critic of Butler's epistemological leanings, argues that Butler fails to explain how individuals, if all subjects are not prediscursive but have agency to choose their discursive performance, vary from the chain of discourse that constitutes the subjects themselves. Benhabib, and other critics of poststructuralism, argues that this lack of agency in poststructuralism reduces this theoretical lens as potentially apolitical and without any attempts at prescription (Barvosa-Carter, 2001; Weedon, 1987). These critiques do have weight—especially if examined while presuming a sense of Marxist emancipation—but many feminist poststructuralists have demonstrated that poststructuralism *can* be used as a

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<sup>18</sup> In the 1990 publication of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

political tool to deconstruct the constraints that hinder our actions within the discursive norms.

Though there are many forms of poststructuralism, feminist poststructuralism is a strand of theory that provides many examples of the ways in which poststructuralism can be politically engaged. For instance, Gavey (1989) investigated cases of rape and sexual victimization that happened within what was called “legitimate heterosexual relationships” or “potentially appropriate relationships” (p. 468). The author looked into forms of cohesion, including “social cohesion” (in which a woman engages in sex only to avoid labels such as ‘prudishness’) and “interpersonal cohesion” (to engage in sexual activities in order to stop a man’s relentless pleading). Despite being forms of sexual victimization, these situations, to the normative discourses of heterosexuality, appear as if the woman is giving full consent (i.e. “he certainly didn’t force me” [Gavey, 1989, p. 468]). Patriarchal discourses, while remaining normalized and therefore invisible, are socially imposing women to engage in sexual acts in which *they did not want to participate*. The language supporting the “legitimate heterosexual relationships” within the patriarchal discourse makes such behaviours seem normal. Therefore, these forms of coercion are potentially invisible. Institutions serve to shape how people understand their subject position in accordance to dominant knowledge, thus naturalizing certain facets of culture as normal and acceptable (e.g. being socially coerced to have sex despite lack of desire to).

Poststructuralist theory focused on concepts of childhood and adolescence can work in the same way. Institutions provide knowledge from an expert position that (re)produces cultural assumptions that seem normal and commonplace, especially through practices that legitimize these modes of thinking. For instance, childhood vulnerability is

a common understanding among educators, parents, and other general caregivers (Malkki, 2010), and this alleged vulnerability often leads to forms of supervision and regulation specifically to keep children safe from risk. The practice of supervision itself circulates the idea that children are indeed at risk and therefore *in need* of supervision to be safe. Supervision, in this light, gives credit to the idea that children are vulnerable, thus reinforcing that these practices are appropriate measures to take. The discursive pressures that (re)produce the idea that children are vulnerable therefore shape the practices that legitimize the discourse. To *not* supervise a child as a parent is easily understood as negligent because it directly goes against the logic that produced the child as vulnerable and in need of supervision.

### **Discourse Analysis: *Speaking Truth to Power***

Critical discourse analysts

argue that language is a central vehicle in the process whereby people are constituted as individuals and as social subjects, and because language and ideology are closely imbricated, the close systemic analysis of the language of texts can expose some of the working of the text and, by extension, the way that people are oppressed within current social structures (Mills, 2004, p.118).

In this way, discourse analysis can identify the ways knowledge operates within regimes of power and how these knowledges serve to (re)produce ways of knowing as natural and proper. Moreover, discourse analysis provides the ability to illuminate certain aspects of culture and how they are normalized within cultural texts, allowing for these texts to be read from a critical vantage point (e.g. analyzing how understandings of consent differ when investigating from outside heteronormative discourses of gender and sexuality [Gavey, 1989]).

As stated earlier, the (re)production of knowledge produces what is intelligible within the current normalized discourse, thereby producing other knowledge as *unintelligible*. Since discourses espouse knowledge that shapes culture and how we make sense of it, a discourse analysis can effectively illuminate the knowledges at work that (re)produce different facets of culture. This can highlight how and why knowledge creates meaning for people and can offer a critique to how this knowledge is being (re)produced.

Following from the above, this project will use a discourse analysis to deconstruct parenting guides and the knowledges that are at work within them. Parenting manuals often supply dense language that perpetuates the circulation of risk discourse surrounding youth and the perceived “emotional assault course” associated with adolescence (Williams, 2014). These texts (re)produce concepts of parenting and adolescence that operate by and through risk discourses which serves as an excellent site for analysis.

#### *Analytic Strategy*

The texts used within this project all had explicit points they made on adolescence (for a straightforward example, the very title of one of the texts is *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy*), but it was often what was said implicitly that provides more of a window in the ways discourse operates. As a result, the texts were read deductively in order to “focus” this exercise. Despite this, the richness of the texts led to inductive methods as the process of interpretative analysis is bound to yield more areas of interest as the research unfolds. Initially, then, the texts were read deductively, but required inductive readings as different narratives emerged. The text was colour-coded into six general themes: Explicit reference to Risk/Risk Discourse/Moral Panic surrounding

risk/calculability over fear/Text as protection; Youth as a subject/Medicalized/Pathologized; Appeal to science as truth/Scientization of culture/Truth claims of adolescence/Legitimization of authority/Exclusion of outside knowledge; Youth culpability as a biological condition; Advice/Parental responsibilities/normalization of adulthood; Focus on interests that reflect adult values rather than youth values/cultural separation of adulthood and adolescence. Despite having six different “themes,” each topic has influence and connection to the overarching risk discourse framework employed in the analysis, and therefore they overlap and contribute to each other.

### ***Conclusion: Ethics, Morality, & Reflexivity***

Considerations of ethics, in all forms of research including poststructuralist work, plays an important role in both how researchers consider how they obtain their data as well as the forms and implications of their research on a broad scale. Poststructuralist discourse analysis, particularly when cultural texts are used rather than human subjects, has a complex but nonetheless significant relationship with ethics. The potential implications of discourse analysis can be rather vast and can warrant negative consequences if done recklessly. Moreover, it has been noted that specific ethical considerations in poststructuralist research can be difficult to pinpoint as many poststructuralists are concerned with truth and the ways truth is represented, making discussions about a rigid set of ethics potentially obscure. For instance, in Butler’s (2005) work, she considered the turn of ethics to be a potential displacement of politics which constitutes an undertaking of normative power that intentionally coheres with institutional regimes of what it is to be ‘ethical.’ More to the point, she considers a difference between morality and ethics pointed out by Adorno: “*morality* [suggests] that

any set of maxims or rules must be appropriated by individuals in ‘a living way’... *ethics* [suggests] the broad contours of these rules and maxims” (Butler, 2005, p. 5, emphasis in original). Within this vein, morality is a lived experience that is intertwined by conditions of reflexivity, whereas ethics encompass the rules to institutionally follow, a distinction that is ontologically relevant to the interpretive practice of poststructuralist theory.

In discourse analysis, more specifically, the writer uses theory to actively fragment particular concepts within language inside a cultural text to illuminate crystallized regimes of power in what is otherwise known as ‘knowledge.’ This is therefore an interpretive (though methodical) practice and is sutured with the very act of analysis. This process of analysis is no longer a process of ethics; it is a moral process that connects, politically speaking, an “ontological horizon within which subjects come to be” and its link to a “moral goal” (Chambers & Carver, 2008, p. 103). It is within this connection that a high degree of reflexivity for a poststructuralist is both fundamental and, simultaneously, not completely possible. More specifically, to identify ourselves in terms of the contours of academic reflection, we must present ourselves in a way that is intelligible to other readers/audience/ etc. On the other hand, as discursive subjects, we operate within the discursive frameworks that shape the ways we understand ourselves and our work. In an institutional sense, by reflecting we are taking up the subject position already produced for us through these systems of academic reflection.<sup>19</sup> In poststructuralism, ontologically speaking, the theorists themselves cannot be free from

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<sup>19</sup> It is in this way that a full sense of reflection in a poststructuralist framework is contradictory to the ways poststructuralism presumes power and subjects. In poststructuralism, the discursive powers that shape who I am as a writer are both too nuanced and subtle to be identified in a discussion of reflection and, perhaps more to the point, this form of honest confession *produces* the very identity categories that many poststructuralists aim to destabilize. Regardless, I believe a conversation on reflexivity, albeit brief, is important for the analyses discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.



discourse, though this acknowledgement of our lack of ability to fully reflect on our own subjectivity is in fact a necessary confession. Despite this, poststructuralism, by nature of the theoretical approach, rests on the forms of reflexivity regarding the entrenched powers in which we speak, and therefore this same reflexivity is what can potentially help to uncover the subjugating processes of discourse and the context of the intelligibilities in which we operate.

This is not to suggest a departure from ethical considerations, nor is it an attempt to ignore the importance of ethical, political, or ideological practice. The point is, in poststructuralist theory, “the language in which we give our account will always disorientate us, will always de-center us, and undermine the sovereign authority with which we seek to make our account” (Chambers & Carver, 2008, p. 100). Simply put, if we speak of our ethics as rigid truth, while we ignore our subject position as ‘truth-makers’ and speak to the power in truth, we are distorting the poststructuralist interpretation process in ways that would not do justice to the scope of this project. So, instead, my interpretive practices will be guided by these fundamental questions: In what ways does my embodiment as a student from an academic institution reflect upon my interpretations of discursive landscapes of adolescence and parenting? As a relatively young non-parent, how can my perspective both hinder and benefit my interpretation? By problematizing scientific regimes of truth, in what ways do my skepticisms encourage schisms that potentially contribute to the unpredictability in which risk proliferates? With these questions as a starting point, the entire interpretive process will be intertwined with reflexivity, as my subject position is also a contributing part of the analysis itself. The upcoming analyses and discussions in Chapters 3 and 4 are formulated with these

questions in mind in order to keep my own interpretations located and understood when considering risk discourse within parenting guides.

### **Chapter 3: Risk Discourse within Parenting Guides**

Risk is often a central component in how experts offer advice to parents about understanding and managing their adolescent children. These experts often use scientific rationales to justify their texts, reinforcing their perspectives as authoritative while obfuscating others'. Through these practices, certain concepts of adolescence are (re)produced as natural, and the ways expert knowledge instructs people to understand, react to, and manage adolescence are implicated in wider cultural practices. As a result, parents are expected to follow these knowledge claims as irrefutable truth, whereas children and youth are, in many ways, understood as patients of a larger, discursive system of regulation and control.

Experts such as psychologists, educators, and doctors hold authoritative positions and dictate what constitutes risks and the methods to mitigate them. From this perspective, the mobilization of such knowledges constitutes an important site of examination due to the overlapping institutional spheres that influence this mobilization (e.g., marketing, education). The knowledges articulated in parenting guides have the capacity to directly produce these concepts as natural and healthy while simultaneously (re)producing the authority of the expert as opposed to everyday citizens, thus sustaining the discursive influence on these ideas under the veil of scientific objectivity. In the following pages, I offer analyses of different parenting guides to highlight the (re)production of discourses of risk and the various effects these discourses have on how we consider adolescence and parenting in modern times.

### *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy*

Throughout Michael Bradley's book *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy* (2003), risk is a theme continuously used to reiterate why this particular book is valuable to parents. Of the three texts I consider, Bradley evokes narratives of risk most explicitly, often using metaphors to demonstrate the dire need for his text when raising a teenager. Among the conversations of adolescence being a threatening time for adolescents themselves, he also notes that parents go through incredible amounts of stress and, as a result, become victims of the various forms of risk that ostensibly define adolescence. For instance, in his opening statements, he considers the text to be a "survival guide" that he later addresses to "shell shocked parents" who can use these readings to "surviv[e] [their] kid's adolescence" (p. xv). "Surviving" translates into successfully maneuvering an adolescent out of their "problem years" (p. xv) towards a time when they can function as a "rational" adult. Bradley's use of the term "problem years" sets the stage for how he describes adolescence throughout his book.

Referring to this period of life as "problem years" also represents a common way adolescents are culturally understood, and, due to Bradley's expert position in this matter, "problem years" is naturalized as a healthy way for a concerned parent to consider their child's adolescence. Following Baum (1976), this use of language configures a relationship between the deviant (adolescent) and the normal (adult) in which it is the adult's responsibility to guide the deviant to normalcy whereas it is the adolescent's responsibility to simply get better (i.e., grow up). Simply put, "problem years" implicitly assumes the adolescent's inability to help themselves due to the inescapability of being an adolescent and the parent's responsibility to manage their children. In this case, discourses of risk actively contribute to the perception that parenting is stressful and

adolescence is risky and that proper parenting requires specific advice and strategies to identify and control for adolescent risk.

This perception that Bradley provides (re)produces the context that raising an adolescent in general should be understood by and through risk (e.g., one must “survive” having an adolescent child) and therefore risk management strategies constitute the only sensible way of controlling these risks. He later considers parents to be “trauma survivors,” who identify other parents of adolescents by their “gray hairs, the facial worry lines, and the knowing, judgment-free nods that tell them *you understand* their pain” (p. xvii, emphasis in original). Bradley thus makes it clear that parents should expect a disaster simply from raising an adolescent, not because of any one aspect of adolescence in particular, but because of all the risks that adolescence encompasses.

This threat of all-encompassing risk is one example of how risk discourse renders unpredictable situations (in this case adolescence) into identifiable and controllable objects to be managed. Bradley’s emphasis on the risk of adolescence rationalizes subsequent strategies to mitigate any risk he identifies as “dangerous.” In this context, the risks he identifies are manifested into real dangers, and all advice that assumes this threat can be understood as sensible. For example, Bradley admits that youth violence has “plummeted” (p. 29) only to go on to state that adolescent gun fatalities “happen every day” (p. 31) and to provide ways of mitigating the risk of a child carrying a weapon by censoring the media they consume. In this case, despite asserting the unlikelihood of gun violence, he still manifests the risk as prominent from the strategies he provides to mitigate this apparent danger. Bradley’s linkage between adolescence and risk “postulat[es] the hypothesis of a more or less probable relationship between certain present symptom and a certain act to come” (Castel, 1991, p. 283), thereby rendering the

“threat” of danger into a scenario that must be avoided. In this case, adolescents engaging in gun violence is identified by Bradley as a risk, and by giving strategies to mitigate it, the risk becomes “real” by the ways people conduct themselves *in relation* to it. The imminent “threat” of gun violence is actively produced by and through the practices (e.g., controlling media content) that reify it into something that can be managed. Risk discourses, as evident in Bradley’s text, actively shape how people are urged to manage their children’s lives through the choices and strategies presented as more “sensible” than others because of the perception of risk if one chooses poorly.

Bradley delivers narratives that emphasize worry and anxiety, which help make his and similar texts into necessities, but he also describes parenthood and adolescence as cohering with a certain spectrum of behaviours. Parents, in this case, are *meant to be* sleep deprived, anxious, and otherwise stressed over their teenager. For a parent not be anxious, in Bradley’s view, means they do not “give a damn” (p. 69), and this book provides “training” for parents concerned enough to “care” for their child (p. xvii). The discourses at work here provide a certain level of rationality for parents who perceive childrearing within the context of risk, and, as Bradley’s language represents, this form of “risk avoidance invariably takes place on a conscious level” (Lupton, 2013, p. 166). In other words, according to Bradley, adolescence can only be controlled if a parent has a full understanding of the inherent threat of adolescent children, and only by understanding these risks can parents perform risk management strategies. Risk discourse forms the context that makes the corresponding practices sensible, therefore reifying the objects (i.e., risks) that are identified.

Furthermore, as certain risks can be understood as everyday practices by some and not as actual “risks,”<sup>20</sup> Bradley’s emphasis on parents “caring enough” to read his text creates a certain sense of morality for following his advice, or perhaps more to the point, a sense of blame to those who do not. As such, Bradley (re)produces narratives of parenting that are fundamentally linked with a level of anxiety, but also with a moral responsibility to understand their children through the context of risk and the ensuing risk management. Risk discourse both provides the lens of understanding adolescence and the rationality for parents to utilize it.

As Bradley constantly reiterates the pressures of raising a teenager (e.g., the “rage, dysfunction, and alienation,” [p. 8]), he also (re)produces a narrative that links successful adolescent development to institutional powers. For instance, while using a metaphor for parenting, Bradley suggests that:

Parenting an adolescent in today’s world is much the same as flying a jet aircraft or performing brain surgery. Any training you received 30 years ago is not only useless, it can actually impair your ability to perform well. Neurosurgeons and pilots constantly upgrade their skills replacing outmoded thinking with new training that reflects contemporary realities... You were trained on a Boeing 707. Do you really think you can safely fly the Concorde? Are you sure you can safely raise that 15-year-old? With the right retraining, the answer is yes! (p. 4)

Bradley, in essence, argues that adolescents are difficult to successfully raise due to their innate complexities, and the only way to properly do so is with professional and up-to-date opinions and training. As such, the core ability to parent rests upon expert knowledge, which his book offers, originating from specific regimes of truth (medicine/science). Bradley is producing a version of adolescence through the

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<sup>20</sup> Certain foods, for instance, can be understood as a risk to some due to their perceived unhealthiness, whereas others may disagree. However, the point here is that if an expert source produces an object as a risk, it implies a sense of morality in following the expert advice, regardless of others’ understanding of that risk.

knowledges he endorses, thereby fabricating a “network of instruments and techniques of power, helping to construct understandings of [adolescence] in space and time and to use these understandings to regulate them” (Lupton, 2013, p. 116). By dismissing prior knowledge while reinforcing the power of his own text, Bradley is (re)producing a concept of adolescence constructed by and through institutional logics that use risk as a foundational rationalizing element.

The “training” that Bradley provides also aims to produce a particular attitude in parents, which constantly frames risk as a set of knowledges that parents can (and should) follow. Bradley’s rhetoric parallels the ADHD moral panic mentioned above; this highlights the ways that discourse can transmute particular concerns into actual behaviours as imperatives for parents. In the case of Bradley, his text is a (re)production of the same type of risk discourse that associates proper parenting with continuous anxiety, and therefore also constant vigilance and the need to follow specific knowledge (e.g., “parenting an adolescent in today’s world is much the same as flying a jet aircraft [i.e., a task that requires education from expert experience]; any training you received 30 years ago is not only useless, it can actually impair your ability to perform well” [i.e., other or outdated forms of knowledge will lead to failure]). Again, Bradley’s use of metaphors (re)produces “meaning and strategies construct[ed] around risk” by linking “rational” parenting with expert knowledge that renders “uncertainties, anxieties, and lack of predictability” into “trainable” strategies (Lupton, 2013, p. 19). Furthermore, this training can only be understood by disregarding or denigrating other ways of perceiving parenting, as Bradley positions other perspectives as irrational or immoral for not actively attempting to counter the apparent risks of adolescence. Proper parenting strategies, in this light, are linked to a specific morality that can only be embodied by following



Bradley's expert knowledge, positioning certain practices as more culturally appropriate than others (Jette, 2006).

Bradley adds to this narrative by discrediting any other common understanding of adolescent development, labeling alternative strategies "dangerous" (p. xvi). Specifically, he argues that "what you thought was good parenting actually can create problems for your at-risk kid" (p. xvi) and that ignoring these new strategies can have catastrophic results, including gun violence (p. 33), drug use (p. 45), and suicide (p. 68). Bradley is actively manipulating the anxiety of parents, under the guise of protection and safety, to produce risk that relies on specifically described risk management strategies that parents must follow by consuming the "training" Bradley offers. Risk, in the way Bradley is evoking it, does not rely on a singular danger that might be associated with adolescence, but instead creates endless potential for risk. To this end, "it is no longer necessary to manifest symptoms of dangerousness or abnormality, it is enough to display whatever characteristics the specialists responsible for the definition of preventative policy have constituted as risk factors" (Castel, 1991, p. 288). Adolescents, in this case, possess risk factors by simply existing as teenagers, and as a result any perspective regarding parenting that does not utilize the same kind of risk language as Bradley's can be easily dismissed as reckless, ignorant, and otherwise immoral. Again, Bradley is constructing an 'ideal' image of parenting, one only attainable by following the advice in his own text. As such, when he positions any perspective but his as obsolete, he renders his strategies into the only preventative measure against the infinite potentials for risk, naturalizing the notion that the only "safe" way of understanding adolescence is to link it with risk and risk management.

Bradley's language does not "confront a concrete dangerous situation," but instead he is "anticipat[ing] all the possible forms of irruption of danger" (Castel, 1991, p. 288). It is our "dangerous world," Bradley notes, and the "insanity that rages both inside [the adolescent's] brain and outside, in his (*sic*) world" causes this stress for parents, and it is within parents' abilities to make this period of life "miraculous or disastrous" (p. xvi), depending on what "tools" they use. As such, the dangerous conditions of the world itself are mobilized, along with adolescent pathology, as a risk that renders any behaviour or situation regarding adolescence to be potentially risky and therefore worthy of parental action.

Bradley utilizes culturally engrained understandings of the "dangerousness" of adolescence to identify subjects (parents) who will potentially be responsive to these risks while simultaneously circulating the illusion of agency in terms of a parent's ability to observe, regulate, and discipline the risk (Lupton, 2013). This emphasizes personal responsibility to manage risk, but it also overshadows the actor's potential to use their own situated knowledge of their particular circumstance. As expert knowledge (re)produces risk as a fundamental responsibility to manage, it is "implicitly constructing a binary between the (rational) decision to solicit expert information and follow the advice of experts...and the (irrational) decision to do otherwise" (Laurendeau & Moroz, 2012, p. 10). By establishing parents as those who must respond to the "insanity" of adolescence, while providing "tools" and possible outcomes depending on the parent's ability to use these tools properly, Bradley is (re)producing a specific narrative of parenting that propagates a narrow range of acceptable practices rooted in follow-able knowledge. For another example, Bradley uses the threat of adolescent drug use as a reason for parents to be extra attentive to their child's behaviour. He rationalizes this by

rhetorically asking “why shouldn’t your kids use drugs?” (p. 18, 19, 20), considering that “we’ve created a world dripping with sex, drugs, and violence and plucked our temporarily insane children in the middle of it” (p. 18). Bradley is presenting drug use as a constant and inescapable tendency of teenagers (“why shouldn’t they...”) while comparing adolescent drug use to a “competent adult [who has] a searing toothache” who wants to use painkillers for “numbing that terrible pain” (p. 19).

In this type of language, there are several themes at work. Most explicitly, Bradley is using assumptions that the world is exceedingly dangerous for adolescents to the point that they undergo intense personal turmoil and that drug use is a commonsense way for them to cope. According to Bradley, adolescents are always emotionally distraught and it is only through drugs and other problematic behaviours that adolescents can “soothe” their pain, unless parents manage these risks properly. Furthermore, Bradley’s way of referring to “competent” adults with a toothache in comparison to a drug-using adolescent denotes both that illicit drug use is a feature of adolescence, and that normal, non-deviant behaviour (like taking medication for pain) is purely an adult activity. In this way, adulthood is positioned as the normative foil to both adolescence and the forms of deviancy discursively intertwined with adolescence. Adolescence is both medicalized from the physiological basis that Bradley uses to describe adolescents (e.g., “temporarily insane children”) and discursively made into a completely separate entity from adulthood, based on adolescents’ supposed inability to make rational decisions (e.g., adults use drugs to soothe toothaches whereas teenagers could only use drugs to soothe their existential pain).

Operating within the same terms as the ADHD moral panic, these assumed adolescent characteristics are produced as risks to be managed by parents. Controlling an

adolescent's innate susceptibility to drug use (or hyperactivity, disobedience, recklessness, etc.) is rendered into ways parents can react to these risks through behaviours and strategies that expert texts provide. The knowledge that Bradley supplies holds a meaning that goes beyond "how to raise an adolescent;" it suggests how parents should understand and navigate the entire concept of parenting. As this knowledge "shape[s] the capacity of individuals to comport themselves as the ideal autonomous citizen that is expected them in risk-related discourses" (Lupton, 2013, p. 171), it also provides a context in which parents can actively use this knowledge to respond to risk. The adolescent is both the physical representation of anxiety and concern (about "insanity" and "abnormality"), but also a manifestation of future risk if left unchecked and unregulated by the parent. As such, the adolescent body can never be normalized relative to the parent because the adolescent body is the carrier of risk. The "insane teen," as Bradley puts it (p. xviii), is not simply an individual whom parents can work with to achieve parental success. Instead, due to the manifestation of risk in an otherwise normal individual, parents must act *upon* the adolescent in order to manage these risks. Furthermore, "positioning children as being 'at-risk' legitimizes the mobilization of efforts at shaping, guiding, or affecting the conduct of children" (McDermott, 2007, p. 318). In this sense, risk gives the "rational" adult the justification, or more significantly, the responsibility to use the preventable strategies that are considered sensible within risk discourse. As parents are coaxed into understanding parenting itself in terms of risk, they are expected to proactively manage risk (e.g., their children) in order to acquire a sense of control over the otherwise uncontrollable condition of adolescence.

For instance, Bradley views raising an adolescent as "if someone stuck a scalpel in our hand and told us to perform brain surgery with no medical training—on our own

child, no less” (Bradley, p. xvii). Though intentionally dramatic, this metaphor reveals the way discourse produces both adolescents and the parents’ relations to adolescents, as well as how knowledge is represented as a means of action and/or completion. To reinforce this style of prescriptive language, dictating what parents should “do” with respect to their children, Bradley has a full section entitled “problem solving strategies.” In this section, he outlines “CRITICAL DOs,” in which each strategy involves a proactive verb, including “monitor,” “trade,” “negotiate,” “forgive,” and “bribe” (p. 223-252).<sup>21</sup> This language denotes an assumption that parents, in order to be successful, must be continuously performing upon their child in order to modify their behaviour, rather than engaging in a collaborative process with the child. Bradley presents adolescents as inherently “risk objects” that can be “ordered only through expert knowledge and practices” (McDermott, 2007, p. 318) designed to control what Bradley describes as “insane” children. Risk discourses, in this case, constitute a lens that produces every facet of adolescence into risk, making proactive risk prevention the only sensible action for a “rational” parent. As such, the adolescent is simply a series of risks being managed and maneuvered, further distinguishing adolescence from adulthood.

A responsible parent, in this discourse, is one who actively responds to the risk of their children and it is through this responsibility that parents can successfully operate in accordance with expert knowledge. The adolescent, on the other hand, embodies these risks due to being fundamentally abnormal as a consequence of the ostensible “madness”

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<sup>21</sup> Bradley provides over 50 examples, including “stay calm,” “accept driving as a scary reality,” “foster real world activities”, “pay close attention to Net activity”, “involve your kids in chores”, and so on. Every example has an action verb. Bradley also offers “CRITICAL DONTs”, in which he uses an action verb to advice against an action. A few examples include “outlaw driving without just cause,” “ignore chronic lapses,” “expect adult responsibility,” etc.

of adolescence. Adolescent madness contrasts with adult normalcy, constructing any behavioural hiccup as a symptom of this insanity: “the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another” (Foucault, 1997, p. 184). It is in this sense that adolescents endure their assumed “insanity” on the forefront of their identity and are a rupture to the image of a normalized citizen. Parents appear homogeneous through the normalized state of adulthood and are therefore solidified as the agents of authority on the outlying adolescent identity. When Bradley notes that parenting is like “brain surgery” on their child, he is (re)producing parenting as a time of administering knowledge *unto* the abnormal adolescent in order to manage and control the unpredictability of adolescence. In the concepts of parenting that Bradley offers, adulthood is represented as becoming a rational and “normal” citizen, while, on the other hand, adolescents are assumed to be pathological and in dire need of parental knowledge and intervention in order to be healthy (i.e., they figuratively require “brain surgery”). This type of language provides contexts for how parents are urged to understand their role and their adolescent children, and serves to normalize adulthood as rational in relation to irrational and therefore dependent adolescence. As such, adolescence is conceptually (re)produced through Bradley’s advice of how parents should “properly” understand and manage their children. Thus, the concept of adolescence is constructed by and through knowledge that (re)produces the dualism of the rationality of adulthood versus the insanity of adolescence.

In summation, Bradley’s aggressive stance in terms of risk and the dangers of adolescence (re)produces notions of adolescence and parenting as being conceptually at odds with one another; adolescents are disastrous for parents unless parents have the

know-how, provided by Bradley, to quell the innate ferocities of puberty and the ensuing emotional chaos. Risk discourse, in this way, is central to how parents understand and act upon their children, as it is risk that offers ways to identify, manage, and intervene in this adolescent “insanity.” This understanding serves to (re)produce parenting as normalized in comparison to adolescent abnormality, imposing an expectation that parents will rationally control for their children’s riskiness.

### ***Brainstorm***

Daniel Siegel (2015), in his discussions of adolescence and parenting, takes a different approach to Bradley; he continuously refers to the conditions that teens face as “the essence of adolescence” (p. 94). Instead of referring to adolescence as a time of insanity or brain damage, he concentrates more on this period as a time of creativity and potential rewards, as long as teens are given the right circumstances in which to flourish. In addition, Siegel provides various “activities” (which he calls “mindsight tools”) for parents or adolescents<sup>22</sup> that could “scientifically” help various aspects of youth development (e.g., stimulating the cortex of the brain [p. 39]; various forms of meditation [p. 111]). Through these and other seemingly empirical strategies, Siegel provides a certain scientific functionality for the governance of adolescence, thereby offering methods for parents to use that rely principally on an “objective” perspective on adolescent physiology (McDermott, 2007). Though moving away from the intense anxiety that Bradley associates with parenting, Siegel embeds risk into parenting from the systematic rationalities of prevention and regulation that he argues are the only true way to properly care for a developing adolescent.

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<sup>22</sup> A distinct difference this parenting guide has as opposed to the other two texts I use is that it describes itself as a valuable tool for adolescent consumers as well.

For instance, a significant amount of his book is dedicated to explaining the “specific circuits in the [adolescent] brain” (Siegel, 2015, p. 84), which he uses as justification for his ensuing strategies and methods. This, combined with elements of risk he embeds within the text (e.g., adolescence as “challenging and catastroph[ic]” [p. 22]), (re)produces a sense of urgency for parents to follow the text due to the type of risk language used, as well as a sense of rationality due to the text being presented as scientifically sound and therefore undisputable. The “naturalness” of adolescent behaviour that is represented assumes that parenting choices and strategies have a direct effect on youth development, making any adolescent behaviour, perspective, or improper choice the result of a parent’s inability to control for these risks. For example, Siegel uses his “Mindsight Tools” sections to “build” brains to strive “toward greater health and harmony” (p. 40). Siegel’s central premise is agreeable as these tools are meant to create connectivity, empathy, and understanding between parents and adolescents, but this is done through the context of parents “scientifically” performing methods on their children to make their physiological development more efficient. Risk discourse is implicit in this conversation through how “healthy” adolescence is characterized by the ways parents understand and manage their adolescent children. In this light, adolescents are simply risks to be managed.

As such, Siegel’s language suggests what proper parenting tactics “address is no longer individuals but factors” (Castel, 1991, p. 288) that can be objectively arranged for success or ignored for failure. Problematic adolescent behaviour, such as dangerous risk taking or unruliness, is a result of parental failure to control for risk factors. The practices and perspectives that Siegel offers (re)produce discourses of risk by and through the logics that design risk to be an abstract but omnipresent quality of adolescence,



particularly how his methodologies “construct the objective conditions of emergence of danger” through the acknowledgement of such risk (Castel, 1991, p. 289).

Siegel relates the story of his favorite teacher being killed by a “nineteen-year-old young man in a brand-new sports car” (p. 19) *because* of the adolescent’s disposition to “risky or dangerous behaviours [that] lead to permanent injuries or fatalities” (p. 20). In Siegel’s account, adolescents will *always* be a threat to society if they are left to their own devices because of these tendencies. This language denotes that adolescence, as a time in someone’s life, is fundamentally destructive unless adolescents’ “energy” is utilized to “make them work for us rather than against us” (p. 24). Here, Siegel’s distinguishing of “us” versus “them” serves to illuminate how adolescents are understood as fundamentally disconnected from adulthood, to the point of being dangerous without parental control and requiring risk management strategies to “work for us.” Furthermore, despite his evocation of the importance of connectivity among parents and their children and how Siegel advertises his book to be for adolescents as well as parents, adolescent perspectives are represented as secondary and/or inferior to adults’ by highlighting adolescent autonomy as risky without adult shepherding.

Following this perspective, adolescent success relies heavily on parents knowing and applying the right methods in order for their children to avoid the treacherous path of negligent risk-taking that they will likely follow without parental regulation and intervention (“how we navigate the waters of adolescence...can help guide the ship that is our life into treacherous places or into exciting adventures. The decision is ours” [p. 9]). This language seeks to “manage and tame disorder and uncertainty” while using risk vocabulary as “an obvious way of ‘ordering’ the disorder manufactured through discourse” (McDermott, 2007, p. 314). This corresponds with the same type of risk

management rhetoric used by Bradley as a rationalization for his strategies, indicating that although Bradley and Siegel take somewhat different approaches, they utilize the same institutional logics concerning adolescence.

Siegel appeals to science as the ultimate rationale of every decision parents should make, with his scientific prescriptions being the most prestigious and most preventative course of actions to take. His evoking of risk is more nuanced than Bradley's; though not as explicit, discourses of risk and science are central to many of Siegel's claims. As one example, Siegel has a section entitled "The Purpose of Adolescence," in which he actively uses a scientific rhetoric, similarly to Bradley, to describe through "brain-imaging studies" how "adolescence is not a stage to simply get over, it is a stage of life to cultivate as well" (Siegel, 2015, p. 74). Though the message itself is again agreeable, the conditions in which he makes this statement impose an authority of science as a justification to these claims, and effectively cause any statement he makes (whether scientifically justified or not) to resonate within the scientific model. It is through this appeal to scientific authority that he naturalizes various characteristics of both adolescence and youth as scientific fact—one that cannot be disagreed with because of the unquestionable veil of objective science. By appealing to dominant knowledges, these texts legitimize the rhetoric they espouse as the only sensible truth, while disqualifying alternative knowledge as outside the institutionalized logic at work and therefore irrelevant (Foucault, 1992). As such, the expert knowledge that supports the discursive separation between adulthood and adolescence is "inextricably linked to questions of authority and legitimacy," thus reinforcing these "truths" about adolescence while also "exclud[ing] a wide range of phenomena from being real or as worthy of attention" (Mills, 2004, p. 46).

Siegel argues that adolescent decision making, for instance, is guided almost completely by hormonal imbalances and virtually all problematic behaviour can be linked back to the adolescent predisposition to be strongly affected by external stimuli (e.g., binge drinking because of the “increase in the activity of the neural circuits utilizing dopamine” [p. 67]; bad eating habits because of “rapid rises in our dopamine levels and activity in the reward circuits of the brain” [p. 68]). Regardless of the actual processes in pubescent bodies, Siegel links the entirety of adolescent choices, behaviours, and perspectives to a static pathology that can only be fully understood through the scientific lens he utilizes. Thus, Siegel is (re)producing ways that parents should think about, communicate with, and manage their adolescent children, relying on the understanding that adolescents are inherently pathological and embodiments of risk. This constructs adolescence itself as a concept that can only be “properly” managed by and through risk and risk management. The language, rooted in the cultural authority that Siegel wields as an “expert” on adolescent development, presents adolescents as afflicted patients, with parents as those who must tend them. Cultural practices shaped by these discourses of risk, such as the types of relationships parents have with their adolescent children and the forms of risk management associated with adolescent “coming of age” that will be discussed later, are presented as a natural part of adolescence.

Siegel also makes a distinct separation between adult and adolescent values. He describes the act of growing up as an adolescent eventually being able to live “fully” (p. 7), insinuating that adolescent lives are not “full” and are therefore incomplete. In fact, Siegel notes:

While [peer] collaboration can certainly be a source of collective intelligence, it can also get you to jump off a cliff or drive too fast. And that’s probably why some form of continued connection to the adults and their adult perspectives

still exist in traditional cultures, and even in our animal cousins. Without adults around, young adolescents can literally go wild. (p. 29)

This language serves to position adolescence as an unevolved state; adolescents need shepherding from rational adults lest their savage tendencies take over and cause animalistic mayhem. Adolescent wants and interests, by association, are unevolved in comparison and adolescents are thus incapable of adult rationality and normalcy. This sort of disconnection, especially when delivered as scientific fact, serves to present adolescence as an incomplete time that can only be cured through adulthood—a trope Siegel disavows in the preface, only to go on to discursively (re)produce it through his language (e.g., “young adolescents can literally go wild”). His use of scientific rhetoric positions these claims as true due to their consistencies with dominant knowledge, thus (re)producing an adolescent culture that intrinsically cannot be integrated with adulthood because of youths’ scientifically “incomplete” bodies and brains. This dichotomy distinguishing youth from adulthood describes adolescents as able to facilitate a “continued connection to the adults” (Siegel, 2015, p. 29), but as never able to adopt the same roles as rational adults (Baum, 1976). As such, there are moral discourses at work that reflect how people understand children and youth, including their relationship to adults, the capabilities they can be expected to have, and their roles within their communities (Brown & Penny, 2014).

This use of language by Siegel is also reminiscent of the founder of adolescence as a concept: G. Stanley Hall. Both Hall and now many experts in contemporary discussions of childrearing construct an understanding of adolescence as animalistic or savage, a framing rooted in many presumptions configured over a hundred years ago. More specifically, Siegel’s language mirrors Hall’s argument that adolescents are deviant

because there are underlining physiological traits that cause them to act “wild,” or animalistic until they grow up and become “evolved” (Cote & Allahaar, 2005). A wild animal (or adolescent), in this sense, cannot control their actions and relies on a rational, “evolved” human to ‘shepherd’ them to safety. Despite a huge amount of criticism of this way of thinking, these underlining assumptions still permeate contemporary literature, as evident in Siegel’s language. In fact, some scholars note that Hall’s insistence on “evolutionary-biological views of human development” (p. 16) – the assumption that adolescents get ‘more civilized’ as they grow up – “has been one of the most enduring, and difficult to eradicate, stereotypes the social science have produced” (Cote & Allahaar, 2005, p. 17). Despite Hall’s dated perspective, and the enduring criticisms of such, experts like Siegel (re)produce these assumptions while still championing a novel, scientific approach to adolescent development.

This notion of ‘wildness’ that Siegel evokes also parallels 19<sup>th</sup> century concepts of deviancy then ascendant in emerging criminology fields. Similar to how Hall coined adolescence through a positivist lens that marked adolescent physiology to be causal to their behaviours, choices, and values, the discipline of criminology was fashioned to be a scientifically objective pursuit that touted its ability to “scientifically” identify criminals even before a crime was committed (Sian, 2017). This way of thought was shaped by a few prominent figures, primarily Cesare Lombroso, but also Hall and other leading scientists of the time (Gould, 1983). Some of the “scientific” methods used included encouraging elementary school teachers to “identify in children the incurable signs of inborn criminality” and to “distinguish between innate criminality and the temporary criminality of all youth” (Sian, 2017, p. 5). Many of these signs used to distinguish between ‘normal’ youth deviancy and criminal deviancy included physical traits such as

the shape of the forehead, stature of the body, and even skin pigment. In this sense, there was a perceived savagery in all youth, but, instead of being able to simply grow out of it, some children were coded as incapable of normalcy and destined for criminal deviancy in an often racialized discourse. In contemporary times, some scholars argue that mainstream identification of potentially ‘problem youth,’ such as “at-risk” youth, is often built around factors such as ethnicity, making some youth prone to being perpetually “at-risk” (Kelly, 2000), and/or ‘criminally deviant.’ Despite the advertised empiricism in these types of codifications, these concepts serve a cultural and “political function [that] sit within a broader historical narrative of racial repression” (Sian, 2017, p. 5), that is often inadvertently reinforced through the language of experts.

In this vein, Siegel (re)produces these discourses by naturalizing a cultural value system that effectively links hierarchal power structures with the governance of risky adolescence. As he integrates adolescent development into a scientific model that depends on parents to “use cutting edge science to make the most out of the adolescent period of life” (Siegel, 2015, p. 76), he is also (re)producing adolescents as risk objects to be maneuvered safely into adulthood by and through the expert knowledge he provides (McDermott, 2007). In this same vein, and while discussing peer social engagement, Siegel notes that part of adolescence is to dismiss adult “knowledge” and explore one’s own dangerous methods for understanding the world (e.g., “jump off a cliff or drive too fast”). Again, adolescence is (re)produced as a construct of risk by Siegel’s language reducing adolescent decision-making to a hazard that can be avoided through specific parental prediction and intervention. In this sense, “risk is made autonomous from that of danger” (Castel, 1991, p. 287), whether it is the hazard of “jumping off a cliff,” or “driv[ing] too fast,” as it is the understanding of these risks in discourses that makes these

potential outcomes even thinkable (McDermott, 2007). As these dangers become assumed to be intrinsically connected to the unregulated adolescent body, controlling these risky bodies becomes the only sensible rationality a “proper” parent can have. Similar to Bradley, Siegel identifies and therefore constructs these risks as tied to a certain kind of morality to “proper” predetection, regulation, and management of these risks, formulating this proactivity as the only accessible way of achieving this morality. As such, practicing these methods produces the “proper” subject (i.e., good parent) of which Siegel speaks.

In one section, when describing an adolescent’s decision-making process, Siegel uses the metaphor that adolescents making decisions is similar to playing “Russian roulette” (p. 70). Adolescents are thus so unpredictable and high-risk that “if you are the one in six, you are dead” (p. 71). Siegel uses an exaggerated metaphor to make his point, but his position as a scientific authority qualifies him, at least in part, as having a certain level of legitimacy. Through this rhetoric, and to the extent Siegel describes his text as a scientific “reality,” he constructs “conglomerations of meanings, logics, and beliefs cohering around material phenomena, giving these phenomena form and substance” (Lupton, 2013, p. 44) that perpetually produce any behaviour or practice of young people in terms of risk (Kelly, 2000). As such, adolescents are sporadic, unpredictable, and dangerous to the point of needing to be controlled because of the underlying risks of their own inability to make wise decisions.

This serves as another example of how experts use narratives of risk to identify potential threats and to create the imperative to control them, thus circulating these discourses as consistent with the regime of truth to which the same expert knowledge appeals. The knowledge surrounding adolescence (re)produces adults as the normalized contrast to adolescent insanity, which, in turn, (re)produces the discursive structures that

provide the capacity for risk to configure the primary lens in which adolescence is understood.

*Understanding Age & Gender through Risk Discourse*

To recall from Chapter 2, according to the “process of hysterization” (Gavey, 1989), a woman’s body is reduced to particular pathologized afflictions that link womanhood to discourses of medicine, science, and risk. Similarly, various forms of knowledge associated with contemporary parenting are regulated through cultural gendered tropes aligned with “natural” dispositions (e.g., “boys will be boys”; see Young & Brozo, 2001). This form of rhetoric is indeed perpetuated in commonplace discourse, but experts—those who authenticate forms of knowledge over others as a form of authority—also naturalize these ideas as immutable and fundamental conditions of growing up. Siegel, when discussing the differences between the “coming of age” practices of adolescent boys and girls, describes male coming of age as associated with heavy risk taking that marks the “youth into the adult world of responsibility,” whereas for girls, “adolescence is a time of acknowledgement of fertility, the ability to bear children and care for them” (p. 29).

This dualism,<sup>23</sup> especially when he argues coming of age for boys is a “biological need to court danger” (p. 22), as opposed to girls who are more fixated on their potential to become mothers, positions males and females as separate entities and inherently distanced from one another as they move into adulthood. Boys move into a cultural position of action and agency; they are troublemakers due to their biological tendency to

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<sup>23</sup> Though it is commonly understood that there are physiological differences between male and female puberty cycles, it is not these that are central to this conversation. Instead it is the naturalization of cultural tendencies through a scientific rhetoric that turns adolescence into a solidified societal icon.



court risk and reward. Meanwhile, adulthood for girls is the ability to bear children and is largely defined by women's bodily characteristics. The discursive powers inscribe different knowledges upon the different forms of objects that are constructed (Butler, 1989), and, in this light, discourses of gender are sutured to the specific frameworks of dominant knowledge, thus imprinting the female body with a unique (and debilitating) meaning in relation to the agency of the male body. In this sense, the expert is providing claims about adolescence that are linked to the institutionalized logic (and authority) of science, thus reinforcing an ongoing gendering process that encapsulates coming of age in western civilization.

Though hysteria was debunked as a legitimate medical condition, Siegel incorporates similar institutional logics by perpetuating risk as a defining factor of certain cultural concepts. His use of language serves to crystallize the culturally produced behaviours of teenagers into a scientifically coded schematic that can construct a teenager as abnormal if they do not fit this narrow criterion. Here, and similarly to the discussions above, adolescence is being (re)produced as a risky construct that can only be "properly" understood within the contours of the discourses that formulate adolescent behaviours as a direct result of their physiological qualities and their parents' ability to control them.

Drawing on Brown & Penney (2014), "risk regimes encapsulate both society's construction of gender relations and what constitutes risk" (p. 272), shaping both the ways that risk management is understood and the ways practices are administered in relation to broader gender roles. Gender, a social construct, is linked to particular risks by and through experts like Siegel who naturalize the ways we even perceive risk as they pertain to gender, and, especially because of the scientific rhetoric used to make these claims, these gender concepts are solidified as a static dualism (i.e., male vs female) and

as a scientific “truth.” So, as Siegel argues, a woman’s rite of passage “to become part of the adult generation” (Siegel, 2015, p. 29) rests primarily in her capability for reproduction rather than on any type of adult agency; the risks that are said to accompany women’s coming of age centre upon themes of sexuality and potential for motherhood. Siegel’s language, especially when defining male puberty as changes in how boys interact with the world and female puberty as only about girls’ changing bodies, configures a spectrum of how we understand risk in relation to pubescent children. Risk discourses influence our cultural gendering processes by illuminating particular risks that are exclusive to either side of the perceived dualism of gender, thus providing a means of understanding gendered roles but also of how to properly control adolescent bodies with the culturally appropriate risk management techniques.

For example, Hilliar, Harrison, & Warr (1998) contend that adolescent women are taught different messages in safe-sex educational campaigns than their male counterparts. Promiscuity is conveyed as a more significant risk for women because of their supposed (and expected) sexual innocence, but at the same time, safe-sex preparation (like owning condoms) is also presented as a risk due to the expectation that women are naïve about sexual habits. Males, who are also taught of the risks of unsafe sex, face substantially less scrutiny for engaging in risky sexual behaviour. Cultural texts, such as Siegel’s, represent this distinction as rational by defining female adolescents solely by their potential for motherhood (“for girls, adolescence is a time of acknowledgement of fertility” [Siegel, 2015, p. 29]), (re)producing the understanding that an adolescent girl’s vulnerabilities (i.e., risks) are largely connected with her sexual practices. These assumptions are reified by how risks are managed, including how risk is

gendered with different meaning in safe-sex educational campaigns and many other areas that assume gendered meanings through the language utilized (Butler, 1989).

As Siegel identifies this “coming of age” from his expert position, he is solidifying constructs of gender as natural and further embeds discourses of risk into concepts of adolescence. Gendered practices, in this light, seem sensible rather than discriminatory and, as discussed, inform and normalize the risk object in question. It is in this sense that the ranges of potential risks are manufactured by and through the cultural meanings we place on gender, contributing to how we make sense of adolescent risk and to the gendered roles we inscribe on emerging adults.

Following the same sensibilities as Bradley’s book, Siegel’s appeal to logic illuminates a cultural condition of coming of age, despite the scientific lens he employs. Risk discourse, in this sense, is projected through the ways Siegel formulates adolescents as risk objects; parents and caregivers can react to sons or daughters in the way risk allows them to understand the assumed dangers to male or female adolescents, respectively (McDermott, 2007). As this shapes parental perspectives on their children, it also manifests the practices in place to control for these risks. Calling adolescence “women’s time [to] acknowledge her fertility” (Siegel, 2015, p. 29) sutures roles of femininity and motherhood onto the medicalization of adolescent femininity, holding a moral rhetoric of adolescent females to a scientific, and crystallized, condition of life. This is a case of the body representing a central vessel for cultural meaning in which risk discourse produces scientific rhetoric that can only be altered by an authentic authority (i.e., another expert). Risk once again is both the identifier and subsequent rationalization of strategy in controlling this risk, therefore occupying the nexus of our cultural understanding of adolescence.

### *Empowering Parents*

Compared to the previous two texts, the articles at *Empowering Parents* exemplify a different approach. While the two parenting guides must be purchased in order for parents to access the advice and strategies, *Empowering Parents* has various articles on specific topics and/or problems that are free to the internet surfer (further “solutions” and advice, however, are located behind a paywall). The free articles give a feel of advertising a product, a “home remedy” for any development problem in adolescence. In addition, there is a comment section at the end of each article in which consumers (generally parents) can ask questions—usually pertaining to their own specific case—to which the author(s) of the article, different “certified” *Empowering Parent* employees, or other parents can reply. Replies often consist of encouragement, recommendations for more articles, and inter-parent dialogues associated with the topics. The inter-parent dialogues are especially interesting since they provide a voice for other opinions and resistance to the concepts in the articles.

In the article *Is it ADHD or Sluggish Cognitive Tempo Disorder?* (Myers, 2015), the author seeks to help parents understand and manage potential disorders through selective observation, and, if parents feel their children do have a disorder, employing strategies on “how to fix it” (p. 3). The two disorders this article takes up are ADHD (attention-deficit-hyper-disorder) and the new disorder that is “generating a lot of buzz lately,” Sluggish Cognitive Tempo Disorder (SCT). The author notes “for the time being, [SCT] is not an official diagnosis, but rather a cluster of symptoms believed to be slightly different from the ones used to diagnose ADHD” (p. 1). The author uses the first 3 pages of the article to highlight all the symptoms that may be caused by one of the outlined disorders. These symptoms include “difficulty staying awake or alert in boring

situations,” “not paying attention to details,” and “avoiding tasks which require an extended mental effort” (p. 2).

The identification of these “symptoms” illustrates how risk is interjected into the very mechanisms of how young people can behave; commonplace behaviours are transmuted from regular mannerisms that even adults can have to identifiers of risk in young people. In this sense, risk discourse renders these behaviours into a specific spectrum of potential “threat,” thus making them both understandable and maneuverable (Lupton, 2013). As a result, these “symptoms” can be processed and subsequently responded to as risk, thereby fixating parental responsibility upon controlling them. Risk, therefore, associates behaviours like “not paying attention to details” with specific meanings legible only through risk discourse and exclusively linked with youth.

In an article entitled *Inside Your Teen’s Brain: 7 Things Your Teenager Really Wants You to Know* (Abraham, 2014), the author discusses adolescent interests and ways parents can understand the hidden whims of youth. Specifically, the article targets parents who “have to guess what he’s [sic] experiencing, which is especially true if a teen is oppositional or defiant (or has full blown ODD [oppositional-defiant-disorder])” (p.1). The author goes on to suggest what teenagers are “actually” thinking, such as “stop trying to control me” (p. 3) and “stop trying to fix me” (p. 2), complete (and ironically) with a guide for how parents should properly react to such feelings. Throughout the text, other articles from the “*Total Transformation Program*” are highlighted as purchasable options, including “parent the child you have, not the child you want” and “how to give ‘fool proof’ consequences” (p.3).

Risk discourse, by and through expert texts like Myers’ (2015) article, (re)produces specific characteristics of childhood as risks subject to interpretation,

intervention, and control. Myers is directing attention to a youth's "experience" and how specific childhood-related connotations brought about by risk factors (such as ODD) can alter a child's lived experience into something potentially more treacherous. For example, "not paying attention to detail," a "symptom" listed by Myers as an indication for SCT, transforms a common child (or adult) behaviour into something that can be effectively understood, and, more importantly, managed by parents and other caregivers. Risk discourse, through the identification of risk itself (i.e., acknowledging that these behaviours are a "disorder"), produces practices and ways of conducting oneself that only make sense if these behaviours are, in fact, risks to be managed. Moreover, by synthesizing a child's perspective (i.e., what your teenager is "actually thinking" [p.3.]) into a calculable risk that must be controlled lest these experiences turn into a behavioural hiccup, any potential agency a child or adolescent may have is instead overshadowed by preconditions circulated by expert knowledge (Lupton, 2013).

The ensuing comment section has a consistent theme within the conversations (e.g., "My son is showing these symptoms, what do I do?") in which "experts" often answer with more articles for the parent to read. In addition, there is sometimes backlash from commenters, resisting the material the authors present. In these cases, other parents often defend the text, frequently describing the therapeutic or beneficial aspects the text offers. One parent, for example, was opposed to the diagnosis of childhood behaviours:

AJ: Really? We still don't understand ADHD and what to do about it. Now we have SCT and CDD (sic) to further confuse the issue. When will it end? One of the main problems with the so-called diagnosis of ADHD is that many of the symptoms are normal childhood behaviors.

MarcyS: @AJ My son has ADHD, and anxiety. The list symptoms of SCT seem to fill in the gaps in the two diagnosis (sic). I know the difference in the things he can control and the things he can not (sic). His behavior is corrected based on that. He knows he has problems and he KNOWS what is not acceptable behavior.... I am glad that Drs. are looking into these conditions

more so that there is more to say about these children than ADD, ADHD, or Autism Spectrum Disorders, to me it says they are delving deeper into these conditions and trying to gain a bigger understanding of what the causes could be. (p. 6)

In this example, when a commenter shows skepticism to the medicalization of childhood behaviours, another user replies by insisting on the authority medicine has on childhood wellness, reinforcing the notion that it is only through science that one can understand childrearing. Furthermore, the conceptual understanding of adolescence in this example is medicalized into scientifically controllable facets, rendering adolescent behaviour into schematics that can be understood as objective features of a specific adolescent. Drawing on Castel (1991), “even those who appear calm carry a threat, but one whose realization still remains a matter of chance” (p. 283). In this sense, the child is the carrier of any risk that encompasses the perceived unpredictability of children, resulting in a need to identify these risks in order to control and manage for them (McDermott, 2007). As MarcyS acknowledges her child to be inherently risky, she is seeking practices to comprehend and control for the risks. Her practices, therefore, represent a cultural manifestation of the influence risk discourses have on how people make decisions and navigate choices.

With MarcyS perceiving her child to be associated with constant risk, which was codified and therefore identified by experts, other unaccounted-for behaviours can only be an indication of more risk within the lens of risk discourse. As mentioned above, the expert’s identification of a potential threat configures the appropriate way(s) of managing it, thus reifying risk by shaping practices to control for it (Castel, 1991). A sense of control over unpredictability can only be acquired from the source that constructed unpredictability to be a risk in the first place. For instance, MarcyS first highlights the

adolescent's diagnoses but then immediately afterwards discusses the behaviours not accounted for by these disorders, assuming that these "unknown" behaviours are the result of another diagnostic that is waiting to happen ("the list of symptoms of SCT seem to fill in the gaps in the two diagnosis"). "Drs.," as MarcyS puts it, are leading the charge in the creation of this behavioural schema, both producing the medical sphere as authority on adolescent behaviour and adolescence itself as a series of symptoms created from an adult perspective. As Baum (1976) puts it,

In short, adults can tolerate adolescence insofar as they can interpret its symptoms as "medical," with modifications. Their mechanistic explanation for deviant behavior, which derives from the scientific view of the world, offers rewards for adults. They point to the physiological developments which have taken over the adolescent body and left it, evidently, helpless... This diagnosis rewards adults by attributing all responsibility and culpability for conflict between adults and adolescents to the adolescents themselves. (p. 186-187)

MarcyS's son, as such, is in part defined by both his adolescence and by the afflictions his adolescent pathology encompasses. Risk operates as the guiding imperative to understand the apparent affliction of the adolescent, as it is through the identification of these potential diagnostics that risk management techniques (e.g., Ritalin/behavioural therapy/etc.) can be understood as viable options. This language serves to illustrate the idea that adults can understand adolescent behavioural problems if they are rendered into manageable risks through the medicalization of adolescence. It provides parents both the understanding and the agency to follow the expert narratives of "good parenting," including surveillance, regulation, and intervention. Put differently, the medicalization of adolescence that circulates within expert knowledge creates a sense of objectivity for parents concerning how to react to their children's (mis)behaviours, thereby discursively (re)producing adolescence as a series of risks that can be understood and managed by a rational and vigilant parent.



Later in the comments section for the same article, the user MarcyS reinforces the text again:

Mick: Sounds like we are making up more labels to identify kids. Not sure how I feel about it. Kids with ADD Inattentive type (sic) don't need more labels. I worry about the potential backlash and the tendency of people to look for excuses for poor behaviours "I can't help it, I have..." Let's focus on behaviors, look past labels, and treat folks as individuals.

MarcyS: @Mick similar to what I said to AJ, I think more break downs of diagnosis are better than saying your child has Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADD, ADHD, when there are obviously more going on with that particular child. I know plenty of Boys my sons age that are in some of the same programs as my son that are rude, disrespectful, cruel and outright bullies and they have NO MEDICAL condition.... He is excluded by many of the "normal" kids and often made fun of by kids his age, so I can't believe that having a label could be any worse for him (p. 6).

Mick, in this example, is resisting the idea that youth should carry labels for their behaviours and thinks they should be treated on an individual level, while MarcyS argues how the labels serve to identify potential symptoms, again (re)producing expert knowledge as an authority on youth behaviour.

The comment section shows the (re)productive nature of discourse, as other parents discipline the knowledge that is espoused within the articles, putting pressure against the resistance of alternative views. This form of influence could be understood as "normative coercion" in which the "state and other institutions urge on individuals for the sake of their own interests" to "normalize behaviours in particular ways" (McDermott, 2007, p. 308). MarcyS understands, through the perspective of risk and risk management, that identification and labeling of these risks means having a sense of control over her children, giving her a capacity to react in an otherwise constricting situation. MarcyS is using the example of the "bullies [that] have NO MEDICAL condition" to refute Mick's comment, but in doing so, she is implicitly (re)producing her child as a risk object to be dictated and managed by assuming that the identification (diagnoses) of these risks is a

central way to mitigate her son's problems. As such, the underlying institutionalized logic defends this form of diagnosis as being in MarcyS's self-interest as a "moral and rational" parent, despite the outlying factors over which MarcyS does not have control (bullies; exclusion). To this end, continuous diagnosis of behaviour and therefore identification of risk is normalized as a sensible way to react to these situations.

Returning to previous sections, expert knowledge regarding adolescent development (re)produces discourses of risk through the ways adolescent bodies are identified and manipulated as risk. As a result, virtually any aspect of adolescence could be made calculable and seemingly objective. Though all the texts operate within risk discourse in similar ways, *Empowering Parents* pinpoints examples in which risk can be manipulated much more deliberately than the other sources. For instance, "not paying attention to detail," an apparent symptom of a disorder, transforms this common child-like behaviour into a controllable risk that any vigilant parent should manage. Since the articles are generally structured to present a problem with an accompanying solution, almost every piece of advice is concerned with risk control. In the most obvious sense the authors are explicitly using risk as rationale for consuming these articles. However, the very way risk is identified is part of the wider scope of risk discourse that incorporates risk as the sole social imperative of choice in general, as evident in the other texts.

The comment sections in these texts do show resistance to these discourses. Both Mick and AJ, the commenters from above, provide alternatives to the underlying logic that the text espouses (e.g., "one of the main problems with the so-called diagnosis of ADHD is that many of the symptoms are normal childhood behaviors"; "let's focus on behaviors, look past labels, and treat folks like individuals"). The utilization of risk as identification and regulation, in these cases, are being contested by consumers of the text.

This highlights that although risk discourse operates on many institutionalized levels, it does not completely replace or overshadow the agentic positions of these consumers.

### *The Hyper-rationality of Risk Management*

Concepts of “proper” parenting are marketed to parents through texts like *Empowering Parents* to reinforce particular ways people are *supposed* to understand and relate to their children. The version of parenting marketed in *Empowering Parents*, in this sense, has a certain degree of legitimacy due to the expert standpoint of the articles’ authors, making the corresponding understandings seem more authoritative than other, non-expert positions. In other words, *Empowering Parents* (re)produces capillaries of power through the expert “knowledge” that they authenticate as truth, and produces the cultural intelligibility of what constitutes a “good parent” while simultaneously constructing adolescents as either normal (i.e., functioning like an adult/their pathology is under control) or disordered (i.e., exhibiting *any* symptom that can suggest affliction). So, similar to buying children’s toys specifically for the supposed cognitive benefits (Kenway & Bullen, 2001), through *Empowering Parents* people can buy products specifically to negate a potential negative behaviour or to encourage a positive one (i.e., “Does your son back-talk you? Here’s tips how to stop” or “How to get better marks”). It is through risk that these particular marketing techniques can be more succinctly directed to exploit parental anxieties.

In another discussion within a comment section, a user asks a question directly to the *Empowering Parents* staff:

181girl: Hello, I have a 15yr old son who was diagnosed with ADHD at 7yrs old. He had the works! Meds, behavioral therapy, visited therapist, etc.... He lacks motivation and has poor study skills. His thinking is “as long as I pass with a 65 I’m good” attitude... He never thinks he is doing anything wrong and does not

want to take responsibility for his actions. He says he is not depressed or sad. He says “mom accept me for who I am.” I am learning not to parent him as though he is the perfect child however I also don’t want him to think it is ok to live life “at just passing”

DeniseR\_ParentalSupport: You bring up a very common concern for parents of teens who don’t seem motivated to get more than passing grades in school.... As Debbie Pincus point out in her article Worried Sick about your Child’s Future? How to stop the anxiety, “faturizing,” is one of the “most negative and potentially destructive things we can do as parents.” Debbie offers steps parents can take now to motivate their child to do better in school in her article 10 Ways to motivate Your Child to do better in School (p. 4)

In this discussion, 181girl first highlights different diagnoses with the intention of indicating the forms of behaviour to the reader. 181girl is concerned about her child’s apparent mediocrity at academics and, despite the youth’s wishes to be accepted for who he is, the parent is seeking expert advice on strategies. The *Empowering Parents* moderator replies with two supplementary articles, both from the same website. As such, 181girl understands the adolescent’s tendency to not be “perfect” as a risk to be managed through the same institutional logic that diagnosed the adolescent as a risky subject. In what Castel (1991) calls “hyper-rationalism,” risk discourse urges a sense of “thoroughgoing pragmatism” in terms of how people respond (p. 289), rendering all aspects of childhood and youth into potential risk factors that threaten the perfection that “proper” parents are supposed to achieve. To this end, any flaw, (mis)behaviour, or “un-adult” choice a child or youth makes can be interpreted as a mismanagement of parenthood, encouraging more vigilance and surveillance. Not only can “everything be identified as risk, but contained within this logic is a contradictory impulse: in an effort to eliminate risk, new risks are constructed and become the target of preventable intervention, resulting in further surveillance and regulation” (McDermott, 2007, p. 316).

As such, the concept of perfection regarding childhood development, despite being an unattainable premise, is (re)productive of endless risk due to the language that

represents childhood and adolescent behaviour as controllable through risk prediction and intervention. The perceived contours of what proper parenting could be in risk discourse are formulated by the sense of risk control, and as these prediction and intervention methods are derived “on the basis of the probabilistic and abstract existence of risk” (Castel, 1991, p. 287), ordinary human imperfection in a child could be interpreted as a lack of risk control. This directs the consumer’s anxiety surrounding the teenager’s behaviour into regulation strategies while also reinforcing the expert’s authority on adolescence by regarding the expert’s perspective as more trustworthy than that of the adolescent or the parent.

In this circumstance, the moderator bypasses the writer’s discussion about the child and his perspective, effectively writing him out of the conversation altogether. The moderator replies simply with more articles for the parent to consume, implying that the solutions lie within this website, while the specific situation is downplayed. This discursive (re)production highlights how this concept of adolescence only exists in terms of what the institutional logics can allow, and how “these systems serve to remind us what to do and what not to do as we manage our [and children’s] (risky) selves” (Laurendeau & Moroz, 2012, p. 5). The answer to the parent’s question and problems, as indicated by the moderator, can only be found by continued reading of expert texts. As hyper-rationalism produces any unpredictable facets of childhood and youth into risks to be managed, it also (re)produces these concepts to be naturally linked to questions of risk and risk control.

Abraham and Studaker-Cordner (2015) provide a good example of this in their article *Smart and Helpless Kids: Can Your Child Make it in the Real World?* The article poses the question of whether “smart” and capable kids can make it in the adult world

considering the increased reliance on technology in recent decades. The central point is that parents can mitigate the apparent risk of changing culture and skill dynamics mainly by observing and assessing children's skills, then teaching a child any skill that is perceived to be absent. The way these absent skills are framed is the focus here; teaching a skill is represented as a way to mitigate the risk of a transitioning adult being unable to carry out "adult" tasks. For instance, the authors outline that "today's 11-year-old is spending hours at night learning algebra" rather than "building bookcases in Woodshop class" (p. 2). This, according to the authors, is an example of how "our culture focuses less and less on teaching our children the skills we all grew up learning" (p. 2). Abraham and Studaker-Cordner do not focus on particular skills in their article. Instead, they focus on what they call the "Culture of Caretaking" that, according to them, leaves today's children unprepared for adulthood.

Risk plays a significant role in this article because it uses concepts of a new and unfamiliar world in comparison to the "old days" (p. 2), representing not just one or two facets of youth as unpredictable but the entire culture in which we live. The authors argue there has been a societal shift towards a "culture of caretaking" in which "smart" children are underequipped as compared to the youth of the parents' generation. Following Castel (1991), risk is omnipresent because it encapsulates a culture as a whole and it is easily identifiable from the large variety of potential risk factors. For instance, a teenager being unable to change a tire can be viewed as a cultural symptom of changing technology, putting the teenager's ability to fulfill adult's role in society in question, despite the fact that many adults also cannot change a tire.

Though not as disastrous as Bradley's example of gun violence, or Siegel's example of dangerous driving, this marks an example of how risk can be the central

theme through which *Empowering Parents* represents youth and their capabilities. Following Jackson & Scott (1999), “ideas about children’s competencies (or lack of them), their specific vulnerabilities, and their (im)maturity, inform adult decisions about the degree of surveillance children require and the degree of autonomy they may be permitted” (p. 90). This suggests that understandings of children, particularly when guided by discourses of risk, influence the extent to which adults can acknowledge children’s and youth’s abilities to act as rational citizens. These ideas of youth also define the extent to which parents can morally expose their children to risk, with notions of responsibility and blame as central imperatives (Brown & Penney, 2014). If it is the “real world” that is the threat to children and youth as Abraham suggests, then the foundational elements of childhood and youth are linked to risk due to the inescapability of culture.

Though *Empowering Parents* is a (re)production of existing parenting and childhood tropes, the use of anxiety, blame, and risk within their parenting advice embodies the discursive processes of parental advice, and therefore normalizes a particular way of parenting. In this way, to disregard the expert advice is understood as an “alternative” and abnormal (and even “potentially destructive”) parenting style. Risk discourse, in these articles, links “appropriate” strategies with risk, responsibility, anxiety, and blame. Understanding adolescents through the context of risk is a central aspect of *Empowering Parents*, and “rational parenting” is represented by parents who both understand their children as risky and vigilantly follow risk management strategies to control it.

### **Conclusion: Subjects of Risk Discourse**

Throughout this chapter, I demonstrated how discourses of risk operate to produce different phenomena into knowable, calculable, and maneuverable systems that are made imperative through narratives of responsibility, anxiety, and blame. These discourses are (re)produced by and through expert knowledge aimed at the public sphere; the parenting guides I consider here illustrate how language is a powerful tool for reinstating these discourses and how they serve to prescribe culturally influenced rhetoric as naturalized. Through this rhetoric, adolescence as a concept is produced as pathological, and adolescents themselves are constructed as medical subjects that require regulation and intervention to control their insanity from the same expert knowledges that configure them as such. Parents must identify with the behaviours of the “proper” parent that the knowledge suggests, therefore embodying a role of normalcy in opposition to adolescent madness. Alternatives to this knowledge, such as simply putting trust into parental intuition, are abnormal in relation and go against the objectivity suggested in the “proper” identity prescribed in the expert knowledge. Parenting following these alternative knowledges is often constructed as naïve, negligent, and otherwise blameworthy for not embodying the current intelligibilities of what a parent “should” be.



## Chapter 4:

### *“Yes, Your Fears are Correct. He is Disturbed, whether it’s Diagnosable or Not”*

These three texts, and indeed a great deal of contemporary advice for parents, are anchored to the same discourses that influence widely understood concepts of parenting and adolescence. As discussed, risk discourse provides a lens through which adolescence can be understood, managed, and disciplined, (re)producing both a spectrum of “proper” behaviours that parents can and should follow and a specific kind of relationship that parents should have with their teenage children. This relationship is characterized by the assumption that adolescent decision making is fundamentally pathological, adolescence is a perpetually dangerous time that must be actively controlled, and adults are the rational shepherds for adolescents.

These assumptions are (re)produced within the cultural texts analyzed in this project, which incorporate institutional logics that normalize these assumptions. Through the scientific regime of truth from which these texts operate, these ideas and concepts are solidified into the cultural fabric of knowing and being. The language, in particular, discursively marks the point of entry for how these discourses operate. The types of rhetoric utilized by expert knowledge illuminate the institutional logics that circulate through these texts, and, more specifically, how risk discourse (re)produces the way many of us view the experience of growing up in western contemporary culture. From the ways adolescent behaviours are largely understood only through their assumed pathology, to how “science” is used as an ongoing rationale, my analysis highlights the tendency of expert knowledge to create a dualism between adolescence and normative adulthood.

Each of the texts reinforce this dualism, albeit in different ways. Bradley, for instance, is straightforward in this dualism as he argues throughout his book that teens are

“insane” and need careful shepherding by responsible parents. Siegel, on the other hand, claims that adolescents are not necessarily “crazy” but constantly prone to disastrous behaviours unless parents meticulously monitor, supervise, and regulate their children’s behaviour to make sure they reap the positive side of development. As shown within Chapter 3, Siegel does have a softer approach, particularly in how he discusses the rewards of proper adolescent development, but nonetheless “scientifically” provides an image of parents as “us” and adolescents as “them” in his conversations. This is especially evident in the way(s) he describes adolescents as a formula or product; if parents get the recipe right, a “properly raised” adolescent is the expected result.

*Empowering Parents* is an outlier in comparison, as each article is directed towards a specific problem, presenting the advice as fragmented pieces of a wider database of knowledge. The articles all have a recurring theme, however, often focussing on a form of risk that must be controlled, bypassed, or eliminated altogether. Furthermore, consumers of this website can strategically only read articles they feel are pertinent to their particular situation, so instead of Bradley or Siegel proclaiming that *all* adolescents are potentially destructive and/or crazy, consumers can interpret each generalized point in the articles as only pertaining to the case under consideration. A parent could be reading an article discussing ADHD, for example, and might interpret the advice in the context of their specific child (i.e., “my child does not exhibit these symptoms, maybe this article is not relevant”). Despite this increase of interpretive agency, the articles in *Empowering Parents* still, and aggressively, (re)produce adolescence as something that can (and should) be read in terms of risk and risk discourse, often providing parents with a series of tools to use upon their children in a way that will seemingly control current or future problems. It is in this way that the

prescribing of knowledge formulates adolescents as objects to be maneuvered by expert knowledge, and for parents to surrogate this knowledge by loyally following the advice.

These texts all (re)produce a certain kind of power relationship between adolescents and their parents that reinforces how parents view themselves, their children, and their relationships in ways that are culturally ingrained from ongoing discursive pressures. Their collective language constructs parents and adolescents as objects of scientific knowledge—a seemingly objectively defined way of both embodying and understanding these cultural roles. The way parents or adolescents conduct themselves can be interpreted by and through the knowledge these expert texts provide, making behaviours that are potentially irrelevant to any real scientific diagnosis readable through risk discourse. So, although Siegel may disagree with Bradley on certain topics, or both may disagree on *Empowering Parents* articles, they all use risk as a way to make adolescence and parenting manageable within their knowledge.

In this way, discourse should be understood as “a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies” (Foucault, 1978, p. 100), which can be a “hindrance [and] a stumbling-block” to one another while still “transmit[ing] and produc[ing] power” (p. 101). In this sense, discourse can exist differently and act in seemingly contradictory ways in these texts while exhibiting the same strategies and logic. In each of these texts, adolescence is imagined as an object of knowledge that should be supervised, regulated, and managed by those in a position to utilize that knowledge.

This discursive logic conceptually positions parents and adolescents into particular schematics that are culturally legible. Bradley (2003), with his more alarmist approach, put it most explicitly: “Yes, your fears are correct. He is disturbed, whether it’s

diagnosable or not” (p. 62). This statement, although dramatic, is representative of more than just Bradley’s perspective on the direness of adolescent development; it exemplifies a power relationship between parents (the fearful) and adolescents (the disturbed). From Siegel’s constant referring to the dangers of unmanaged adolescence (2015, p. 71) to *Empowering Parents*’ nonstop obsession with risk control for many specific issues affecting teens (Myers, 2015; Abraham & Studaker-Cordner, 2014), the archetype of a fearful parent and a disturbed adolescent is a strong commonality between texts.

Adolescence as a concept is produced as pathological, requiring parental regulation and intervention. Parents risk censure if they fail to follow expert knowledge in a way that coheres with the logic, anxiety, and general perception of risk, therefore rendering parenting to be conceptually defined by expert knowledge. Parents, in this sense, are (re)produced as objects of scientific knowledge who must obey the exhaustive list of how a “proper” parent should control themselves and their children. As such, a concerned parent and an “insane” adolescent are fundamentally attached to one another. The “disturbed” adolescent must be disturbed for the “proper” parent to be fearful, just as the non-disturbed adolescent does not exist in risk discourse and therefore a non-fearful parent is naïve or negligent. These two discursive concepts are only legible with the existence of one another, with risk as the central tool for defining and understanding both.

As risk makes facets of adolescence legible for parents and practitioners to manage, it also equates parental normalcy with a high level of anxiety and fear over ever-impending threats. A normal parent, as represented in expert texts, is anxious but vigilant, fearful but zealous. Despite the approved amount of emotional trauma, parents are not coded as pathological in risk discourse. Instead, these traits are acceptable *only because* of the proximity to the adolescent’s pathology. If the adolescent did not exist, the parent

would be irrelevant to these discursive scripts. The presence of a discursively meaningful adolescent provides meaning to the parent within the context of the operating expert knowledge.

Adapting Foucault (1965), adolescents in risk discourse are produced as patients of their own affliction, all their decisions connected with pathology that must be regulated. Parents are produced as the governors of their adolescents, and, as evident in expert texts, are themselves regulated by the knowledges espoused by how they control (cure) their adolescent's afflictions. In this way, experts can prescribe their knowledges onto youth in a way that is similar to how a doctor interacts with his or her patient: "the madman's body was regarded as the visible and solid presence of his disease: whence those physical cures whose meaning was borrowed from a moral perception and a moral therapeutics of the body" (Foucault, 1965, p. 183). An adolescent's (pubescent) body marks the meaning of their insanity. It is by and through this prescribed meaning that doctors, parents, caregivers, and educators can react to this meaning by administering "cures" to the madman (i.e., regulated techniques, prescriptions, interventions, etc.). When expert texts suggest using scientific techniques to help prevent, quell, or control adolescent behaviours, they are discursively (re)producing teenagers as pathological and therefore unpredictable subjects, further taking up risk as a means of control. Adolescents, in their erratic risk-taking predispositions, are therefore objects of medical and scientific scrutiny, both explicitly in the language employed (e.g., pathological; insane [Bradley, 2003, p. xv]), but also implicitly (e.g., via the scientifically calculated procedures or tools used by parents on their children to manage and regulate behaviour [Siegel, 2015, p. 38]).

Insanity is marked upon adolescence through a cultural morality of “science,” a disposition constructed through risk discourse that considers youth development as a whole to be an embodiment of risk. Meaning is inscribed into the known physiology of adolescence, and the actions and behaviour of any adolescent are thus meaningful in the context of their perceived medical condition. For an adolescent to exist beyond these prescribed meanings is both impossible and irrelevant, as the current intelligibilities of risk discourse and adolescence render any action to be a (re)production of the dominant knowledges.

The discursive pressures, flourishing through discourses of risk and responsibility, thus construct the adolescent as a medical subject who must be surveyed, managed, controlled, and effectively acted upon by parents utilizing expert knowledge (Bessant, 2001; Kelly, 2000). As this circulates understanding of risk and responsibility among parents, it also (re)produces particular messages of how society conceives of adolescence as a concept. As adolescents embody an object of social concern, risk anxiety not only represents a societal fear *for* youth, with regard to their own wellbeing, but also a fear *of* youth, of what they might do if they are not kept within the reasonable boundaries of parental control (Scott, Jackson, & Backett-Milburn, 1998).

### ***Conclusion: Parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century***

As discussed in this thesis, adolescence is the embodiment of risk and parents are the recipients of the associated anxieties, responsibility, and blame, bearing the burden of controlling such risk. Risk discourse, within these texts, produces a specific narrative of what proper parenting is in relation to the pathological adolescent, thus *constructing a set of values and belief systems that creates subjects that fit these schematics*. Adolescence,

as we currently understand it, is a manifestation of culturally produced expectations of what it is to be a teenager that is exclusive to the physiological transformations of puberty. The discourses at work within parenting guides provide a form of social control that goes beyond adolescent development. The ways people think, behave, worry, and react are all influenced by powerful institutions that contribute to how identities are shaped by risk discourse. Youth development is an aspect of social life that pervades almost all major cultural institutions, and is therefore highly susceptible to the influence of discursive powers that shape the contours of knowledge.

This also keeps adulthood associated with reason, predictability, and stability; the normative foil to adolescence in risk discourse. As such, and adapting Foucault, parents defer to experts with the adolescent, thus authorizing the universal scientific logic of science to designate the role of adolescence in relation to adulthood (Foucault, 1965, p. x). Appealing to the language and power of expert knowledge, parents authenticate themselves as immune to adolescent madness (and therefore as reasonable in comparison) through the dualistic conditions of adolescence versus adulthood and/or pathological versus normative.

Risk discourse, then, achieves two different things. First, it simultaneously produces adolescence and adulthood, giving them each different characteristics, dualistically structured: irrational and reasonable, unpredictable and stable, and so forth, respectively. Second, risk discourse inspires a set of scientific tools for parents, the managers of adolescence, to keep their children in check. Adolescents and the period we refer to as adolescence are produced through both risk discourse and the practices it engenders. My aim in emphasizing discourse has been to denaturalize the ideas that the

parenting guides I have explored take for granted and reproduce as unilateral and scientifically proven truths.

Each of these texts represents a different style of parental advice, but they are all rooted in the same cultural tendencies that perpetuate discourses regarding both parenting and adolescence that (re)produce certain ways of deducing knowledge. As Lupton (2013) notes, risk configures particular schematics of how people can and should navigate their lives on a very basic level; the ways people make decisions about their lives are rooted in regulated scientific considerations and in reflex, and the navigation of identified risk. That being said, the ways everyday people make decisions, *especially* when dealing with a population that is essentially defined *by and through* risk like adolescents, are based almost entirely on naturalized discourse that holds up “scientific” rhetoric as the only true rationale for proper choices—despite how culturally confined these choices actually are. Each of these texts uses cultural assumptions as “scientific” fact, often through the lens of risk discourse, (re)producing adolescence as an amorphous state in which youths will be “naturally” formed into the objects of which these experts speak.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, parenting guides can help illuminate the ethos of parenting from any given time period. The guides analyzed within this thesis show discrepancies in how they offer each specific message, but are overwhelming similar in utilizing risk as both an identifier of potential problems in adolescence as well as a central management style of how parents can and should control for risk. As parenting guides evolve throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the changing socio-political landscapes, the parenting guides analyzed are likely to continue reflecting contemporary conditions. The rise of concepts such as stranger danger and the increased amount of risk management strategies found in institutions like education speculatively mirror the cultural trend found



in parenting guides, and the impact of the vast utilization of risk discourse likely has yet to be fully realized. Further research may uncover the extent to which the themes present in these parenting guides influence (and are influenced by) the current and future state of parenting, adolescence, and culture.

### *Areas of Future Research*

A considerable amount of research regarding child and youth development is proscriptive in nature; problems are identified and suggestions and/or solutions are offered to benefit the programs and individuals that are the focus of these studies (e.g. benefits of youth sport programs [Hartmann, 2003]; after school poetry sessions for interpersonal development [Wiseman, 2011]; problems of using “risk” as a codifying term [Kelly, 2000]; etc.). These forms of research are critical for programs and practitioners to identify areas of potential concern and/or benefit on the grassroots level, as it is often on the foundational level positive change can be seen most directly (Hartmann, 2003). These approaches, however, often fall short in discussing the concepts of adolescence as a potentially problematic area, as these concepts are ingrained in culture as simply common-sense.

That being said, and unlike the forms of research previously described, this thesis does not provide a proscriptive sense of emancipation that trends in this scholarly field. Instead, I am concerned with parenting guides and how risk discourse is (re)produced by and through constructed concepts of parenting and adolescence, indicating how underlining features of culture can put discursive pressures on how knowledge is represented and mobilized into the public sphere. In this light, my intent with this thesis is to provide an interpretation of the conditions that knowledge produces and (re)produces

on a normalized level, intending on speaking truth to power and illuminating normalized discourse as per the poststructuralist tradition (Butler, 2005).

It is my hope that this (and other) research encourages youth development scholars, practitioners, educators, and other experts to consider the discursive impacts of how concepts of adolescence are utilized and discussed, particularly through the lens of risk, and what the consequences of failing to do so can be on the lives of those affected by the associated assumptions. This is not to say that research or practice that does not explicitly highlight these discourses at work should be disregarded or criticized; instead, it should be illuminated by all involved that our understandings of adolescence and parenting are fluid and culturally produced. Although there is a substantial amount of scientific evidence regarding adolescence, the relationships, understandings, interpretations, and utilizations of this evidence is all subjective and therefore susceptible to cultural influence.

One productive avenue of further research could explore the degree to which people can/do resist the pressures of discourses of risk, especially when it pertains to adolescence and childhood development. The ability for consumers to resist these narratives was briefly discussed in Chapter 3, but it represents a fruitful line of research as to the extent of resistance, and the capacities and practices of those who contest these discourses. Education, for instance, is an institution that has been under a poststructuralist lens on multiple occasions (e.g., Cohen, 2008), but the extent to which teachers and practitioners cohere and resist discourses of risk could be further explored.

Furthermore, the field of youth and adolescent development, especially because risk is a tool actively used for many programs (Kelly, 2000), would be an interesting site

of investigation for embedded discourses of risk in the form of logics and assumptions. The relationships between youth and practitioners, in terms on the different forms of normalization agents, would serve as a jumping off point to investigate whether and how risk discourse normalizes the concepts of adulthood in opposition to adolescence, and to what end risk discourse itself shapes and renders knowledge into understandable behaviours and characteristics. This goes beyond youth and childhood research, as questions of gender, occupation, class, (dis)ability, recreation, and so on are all picked up by institutionalized knowledges and are all potential facets of risk and risk discourse. Adolescent citizenship, in particular, was a question beyond the scope of this project, as positive upbringing is often discursively linked with aspects of nationalism, cultural coherence, sexuality, race, and other non-deviancy to traditional values, with (forms of) risk potentially providing ways to understand, manage, and intervene into if deemed necessary by the applicable institution. This further research can potentially open doors for a deeper understanding of adolescence and parenting as a whole, making ‘growing up’ into a more fruitful event for everyone involved.

### *Revisiting Reflexivity*

As mentioned in Chapter 2, reflexivity is an important concern of poststructuralist research as understanding one’s position in making claims about ‘truth’ is both contradictory in some sense but necessary if one is to critique discourses at work in day to day operations. It is for this reason that during the interpretative process of my analysis, and now as I reflect upon it, proceeding reflexively proved to be quite difficult, and perhaps appropriately so. I speculate this was the case because in some sense I was trying to ‘write myself into’ by continuously considering the types of discourses I was

(re)producing while deconstructing the parenting guides. The topic that seemed to keep coming back to me was actually a consideration I highlighted in my previous discussion about reflexivity: *As a non-parent and relatively young, how can my perspective both hinder and benefit my theoretical interpretation to the extent that I, myself, negotiate risk and the accompanying discourse?* To be sure, the other questions I asked myself throughout this project provided times of reflection and wonder, but the way(s) I spoke about parenting and ways to parent as a non-parent continuously struck me as if I was speaking to something that I simply didn't quite get, regardless of the theoretical tools that I used to make my claims and deconstructions. As discussed, poststructuralist discourse analysis is an interpretative process that has a certain degree of subjectivity in the ways concepts like childhood and parenting are understood and utilized. My position as a non-parent, especially because I exist among many operating discourses and (re)produce many different concepts as I choose, make decisions, and interpret phenomena, makes me wonder in what ways has my perspective shaped the ways I contemplate topics such a risk and risk management. This is not a limitation, nor is it a benefit in any way. It is simply something I had to negotiate as I undertook this project and will be something I consider if one day I become a parent myself.

#### *Limitations*

This project is concerned with how discursive tropes of parenting and adolescence are (re)produced and naturalized, examining parenting guides as a product and producer of these assumptions. Though this can illuminate the ways discourse operates within particular vehicles of expert knowledge, and how this is representative of the contemporary condition of parenting and adolescence, this is but one conduit in a

much greater and intersecting fabric of discourses that (re)produce these kinds of knowledge. As such, this project is necessarily only one piece of the puzzle, but despite this, it exposes deeply connected regimes of power to expert knowledge intended for public consumption.

Furthermore, this project is not concerned with seeking a sense of proscriptive emancipation from exposing these potentially harmful naturalizations of power. As stated earlier, it is not my intent to evaluate science or to simply denounce these authors. Therefore, it is also not my intent to provide an alternative to these ideas, aside from highlighting problematic areas. My central concern is in the ways discourse is naturalized, and the consequences of such naturalization.

This project is focused on contemporary North America. Due to the transient nature of knowledge mobilization, it is difficult to localize ideas to a specific region (e.g. Alberta/Canada). More to the point, in discourse analysis, it is not the focus, either. Discourse analysis methods investigate the general discursive position of a culture, and though it is possible to investigate a particular site of discourse, such as schools or other similar institutions, discourse itself works throughout culture and therefore one cannot clearly make regional distinctions. Despite this, it could be argued that risk discourse can be localized in terms of demographics rather than geography. For instance, an upper-class white family likely has a very different construct of risk than a working-class minority family. Further research could look into how risk is produced in different demographics and what exactly that means for each of the families.

Lastly, and although this was mentioned briefly earlier as potential future research, the question of citizenship is tied closely to many of the discussions I offer in this thesis and the absence of an in-depth consideration of this topic represents a

limitation of a sort. Within the parenting guides used, a large amount of the language circulates around raising a teenager so they can effectively operate in adulthood when they become of age and maturity. An effectively operating adult, or a 'proper' citizen, has many different connotations pertaining to what exactly that represents, and, as mentioned before, is intimately tied with many different facets of contemporary culture including race, class, sexuality, and so on. As some contend that parenting guides shifted in the 1990s into many different niche markets that are not representative to any one demographic (Quirke, 2006), an investigation into class within parenting guides would require an analysis of many different kinds of texts. Despite these conversations being just beyond the scope of this thesis, the proximity citizenship has to many of the topics indicates both a limitation for not addressing these conversation explicitly within this project as well as an avenue for future research.

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